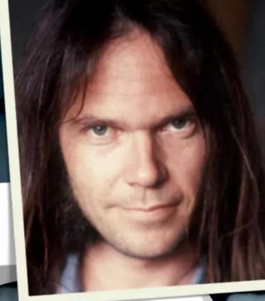
NEIL YOUNG HIS LOST CLASSICS UNEARTHED!



MOJO

The Music Magazine

148 REVIEWS
PAUL McCARTNEY
ARETHA FRANKLIN
JIMI HENDRIX
ELTON JOHN
& MORE

"THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS KNOWING WHEN TO STOP..."

THE WHITE STRIPES

THE FULL STORY AT LAST!

2020
THE ULTIMATE REVIEW
20-PAGE SPECIAL!

75 BEST ALBUMS OF THE YEAR

AC/DC RECHARGED!

LINDA THOMPSON ON RICHARD THOMPSON

PHAROAH SANDERS A JAZZ GIANT TELLS ALL

EDDIE VAN HALEN R.I.P.

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> "He had a sixth sense about protecting his art, knowing it would serve him well."
>
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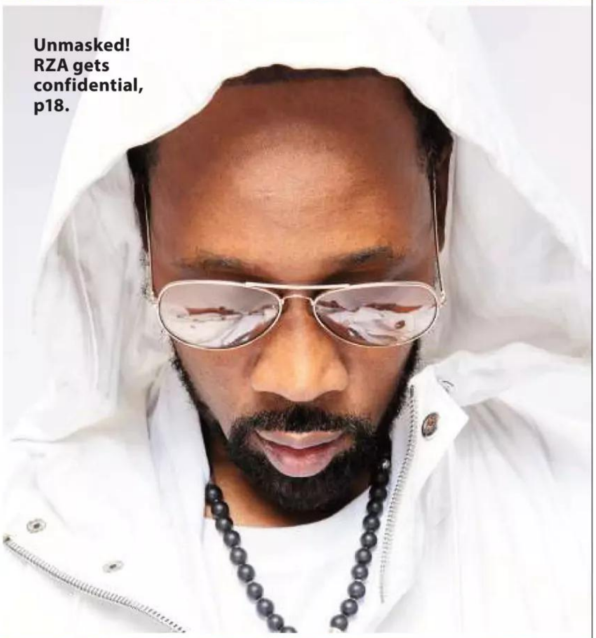
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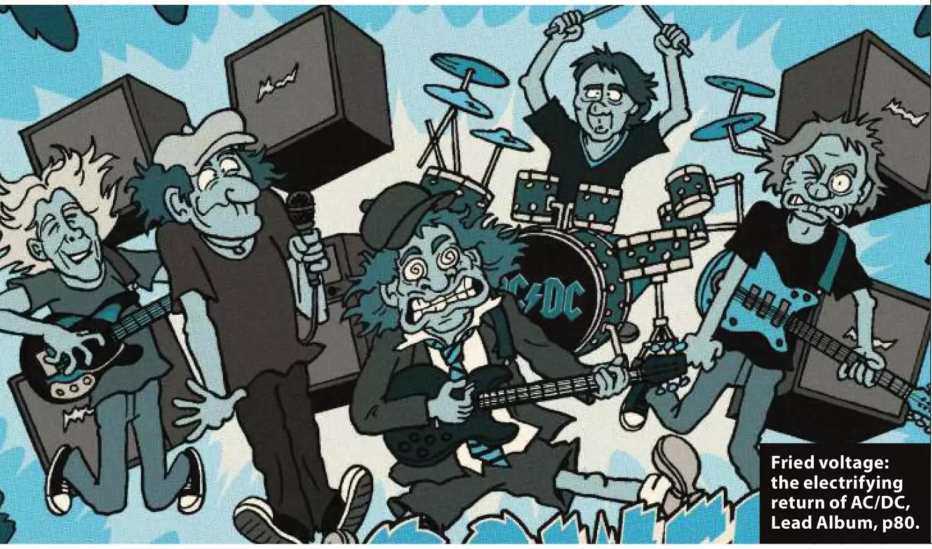

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16 MARIANNE FAITHFULL Struck down by Covid in April, things looked bleak for the music legend. But new creation has come: calling from home, she tells us all about her romantic new album.

18 RZA On a roll after making his new movie Cut Throat City, Wu-Tang's mastermind casts the runes in Confidential manner: "We either move all as one or nobody moves at all," he says.

20 SHANE MACGOWAN Julien Temple tells us about his new documentary on The Pogues' complicated figurehead and the contradictions that keep him warm.

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94 REISSUES Aretha Franklin reclaims her crown, plus Elton John and many more.

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110 BOOKS Pearl Jam, Brian Eno, Peter Frampton, John Densmore and more.

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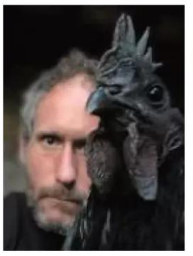

Grayson Haver Currin

Grayson lives in North Carolina, and began writing for MOJO this year. He also writes for The New York Times, Washington Post, Outside Magazine and others. During quarantine, he began raising chickens, including this rooster, Joni Mitchell. Grayson reviews Jimi Hendrix on page 106.

Kevin Westenberg

"It was a great day in May, 2002 having the honour to photograph Jack and Meg for MOJO in an abandoned MOT Garage in Camden. It was their first UK monthly magazine cover. Now 18 years later, with their place in R&R history firmly enshrined, it's been a double honour to revisit this seminal session (*see p66*)."

Laura Howell

Laura Howell likes drawing things that make people laugh. She's been a Beano artist since 2007, so she has plenty of opportunities to do this. See her Lead Album illustration on p81 and more of her silly scribbles at www.laurahowell.co.uk or @victorianclam on social media.

Laura Howell, Anastasia Lebedeva

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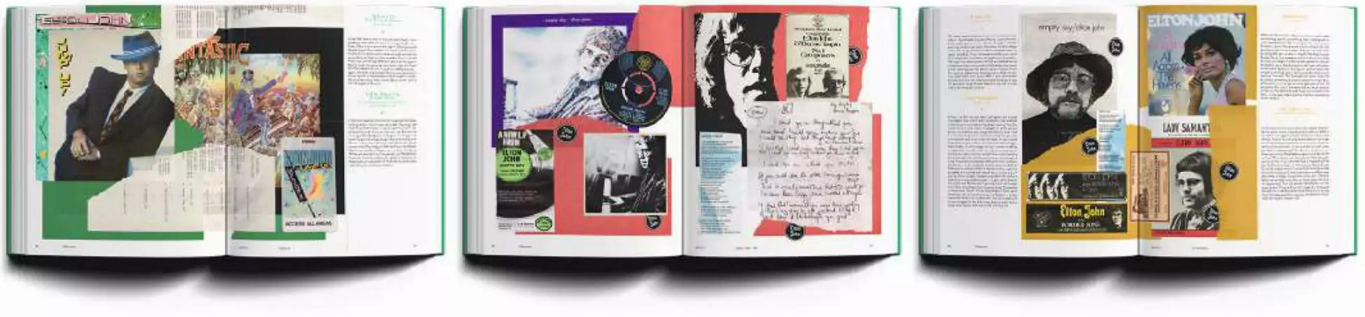

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NOVEMBER 13

ROCKET ENTERTAINMENT EMI UMC

THE REPLACEMENTS

PLEASED TO MEET ME

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29
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HEARD TRACKS!

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NEWLY REMASTERED
PLUS DEMOS,
OUTTAKES &
B-SIDES*

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Album Rough Mix
with Alternate Tracklist*

HARDCOVER BOOK

Rare Photos & New Liner Notes

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THE BEST OF 2020

Frazey Ford

VANCOUVER SOUL

What music are you currently grooving to?

I've been revisiting **Nina Simone**'s live 1968 album, *'Nuff Said!* She's the master of impeccable, sparse groove. I also love **Khruangbin** and **Leon Bridges**' collaboration EP, Texas Sun, and **Deva Mahal**'s cover of her dad's [Goffin & King cover] Take A Giant Step. I'm newly obsessed with an Ethiopian nun and solo pianist **Emahoy Tsegué-Maryam Guèbrou**. She's otherworldly. **Joan Armatrading**'s *Whatever's For Us*, was my summer go-to record. **Jennifer Castle**'s *Monarch Season* is dreamy.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

It would have to be **Al Green**, *I'm Still In Love With You*. I've listened to it thousands of times. I never tire of it.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

When I was about 11, I used to get a $5 allowance for doing chores. I'd ride the bus every weekend to A&B Sound in Vancouver. The first record I bought was **Prince**, *Purple Rain*. My best friend and I would change the light bulbs to blue and stay up in our purple '80s outfits, lip syncing and air guitaring to When Doves Cry and Let's Go Crazy.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

I really wanted to be **Diana Ross**, when I was 10.

What do you sing in the shower?

Lately, **Joni Mitchell**'s Court And Spark, **J.J. Cale**, Don't Go To Strangers.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

Funkadelic, *Maggot Brain*, or **D'Angelo**, *Voodoo*.

And your Sunday night record?

I've spent Sunday mornings since the pandemic began watching **Phil Cook**'s livestream gospel show, Spiritual Helpline. It's a beautiful vibe.

Frazey's U Kin B The Sun is on Arts & Crafts.

ALL BACK TO MY PLACE

THE STARS REVEAL THE SONIC DELIGHTS GUARANTEED TO GET THEM GOING…

Dame Shirley Bassey

STILL BEWITCHING

What music are you currently grooving to?

Michael Bublé. I love his style. What a talent he is! Of course, I've always adored **Elvis** too. We performed in Vegas together many times. He once doodled a message on my tummy, I didn't wash it off for a week!

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

Well it has to be my latest – *I Owe It All To You*. It tells my story. The songs all feel very personal to me and to my life, they relate to me, the emotions of them – otherwise I couldn't sing them [the album includes a cover of **Queen**'s Who Wants To Live Forever and the **Bruce Forsyth** tribute Almost Like Being In Love].

Ben de Biel, Matt Holyoak

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

It was a **Judy Garland** vinyl record – I can't remember the name – from an old record store in Cardiff. There was no one like her. She exposed herself utterly. And when I started singing, I couldn't be shut up, ha ha! I usually sing instead of cry, but I find music very moving.

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

Nobody! I was too busy working on my own musicianship making myself the best I could be. I wanted to develop my own style, not sound like anyone else.

What do you sing in the shower?

Singin' In The Rain! What else?

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

Barry White's *All-Time Greatest Hits*. Never, Never Gonna Give Ya Up, Can't Get Enough Of Your Love, Babe, You're The First, The Last, My Everything… just fantastic. I like a bit of country music too. Often on Saturday nights I like to watch movies. I'm a big fan of westerns.

And your Sunday morning record?

I don't play music on a Sunday morning… I'm too busy lying in!

Dame Shirley's I Owe It All To You is out now on Decca.

Pole

BERLIN DUB MINIMALIST

What music are you currently grooving to?

I'm enjoying listening to reggae again. It's getting cold outside and this warms me up a lot. I lost contact with it for a while but now I can enjoy it again. Jazz is always on the player as well, as well as some electronic music.

What, if push comes to shove, is your all-time favourite album?

I have so many. I only keep a record if it's strong enough to stay on my shelf. Maybe **David Bowie**, *Hunky Dory*, **Public Enemy**, *Fear Of A Black Planet*, or some of **Miles Davis**'s releases.

What was the first record you ever bought? And where did you buy it?

I bought **Phil Collins**' In The Air Tonight as a 7-inch, when it came out, from a RadioShack in Düsseldorf. It wasn't the first record I owned but it was the first one I bought by myself. I was so proud of it, because of the B-side, The Roof Is Leaking – a much better song. My friends made jokes because I liked it better than the hit on the A-side.

> "Maybe I would like to be Harry Belafonte. But not Sting."
>
> **POLE**

Which musician, other than yourself, have you ever wanted to be?

I never thought about it. Maybe I would like to be **Harry Belafonte**. Definitely not **Sting**.

What do you sing in the shower?

Nothing. I am a lousy singer, I would be afraid that anyone could hear me while I was doing the howling wolf.

What is your favourite Saturday night record?

Well, again there are so many records which I listen to, either on Saturday evening or on Sunday mornings. It depends on what I am up for, or what I am planning. But just to name one for Saturday evening, let's say [various artists collection] *Black Slavery Days* on Clappers Records, 1975.

And your Sunday morning record?

For the Sunday morning blues: **Keith Hudson**, *Playing It Cool & Playing It Right*.

Pole's Fading is out now on Mute.

CARGO COLLECTIVE

HALF JAPANESE
CRAZY HEARTS
FIRE RECORDS LP / CD

A philosophical psych-tinged journey with Jad Fair's whip-smart observations and life-affirming sentiments. Transparent turquoise vinyl. "Half Japanese sound as urgent and vital as they did four decades ago." NPR

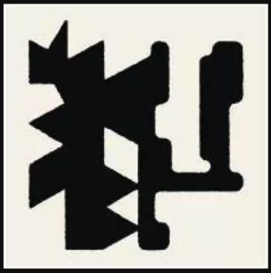
THE WILDHEARTS
91
21
30 YEAR ITCH

THE WILDHEARTS
THIRTY YEAR ITCH
LABEL LP / CD

Recorded live during the band's The Renaissance Men & Diagnosis tours during 2019. This 17-track album showcases the incendiary energy that has made The Wildhearts one of the best loved UK live rock acts of the last thirty years.

JOSEPHINE FOSTER
NO HARM DONE
FIRE RECORDS LP / CD

Eight new slow-burning songs branch forth from idiosyncratic country folk blues, sung with sibylline wit and a hint of the absurd, awash in sensually anachronic lyricism. "Remarkable, ghostly music" The Guardian.



VARIOUS ARTISTS
PLANET MU 25
PLANET MU CD

25th anniversary compilation. It's a mid-price cd, a snapshot to show where we are at after 25 years of the label. A selection of our roster and what we're releasing in 2020.

Robbie Basho
Song of the Avatars: The Lost Master Tapes

ROBBIE BASHO
SONG OF THE AVATARS: THE LOST MASTER TAPES
TOMPKINS SQUARE 5CD BOX

His albums for Takoma and Vanguard have left an indelible trail of influence across generations of musicians, from William Ackerman and Pete Townshend to Ben Chasny and William Tyler.

The AWKWARD SILENCES

THE AWKWARD SILENCES
THE AWKWARD SILENCES
BLANG RECORDS LP / CD

Inclusive outsider pop mavericks and Antifolk legends The Awkward Silences eponymous 4th album. Off-kilter Daniel Johnston-esque pop songs inspired by Ian Dury and Iggy Pop.

PHARAOH OVERLORD
6
ROCKET RECORDINGS LP / CD

Electronic panorama of Kraftwerk, cinematic austerity of EBM & effervescent pulse of Italo-disco: Alchemical venomous disco akin to Moroder's futuristic serenades with the hellfire preacher of Mayhem's vocals.

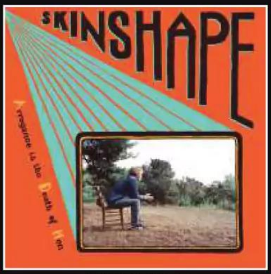
QUATERMASS SEVEN

LITTLE BARRIE & MALCOLM CATTO
QUATERMASS SEVEN
MADLIB INVAZION LP / CD

Little Barrie and Malcolm Catto team up for an all new full length that takes influences of the past and pushes them into the contemporary.

DEAFHEAVEN
10 YEARS GONE
SARGENT HOUSE 2LP / CD

A celebration of Deafheaven's incredible career as a band thus far, teaming with longtime producer Jack Shirley to deliver a studio session version of the 10th anniversary tour set they planned for 2020


SKINSHAPE
Arrogance is the Death of Men

SKINSHAPE
ARROGANCE IS THE DEATH OF MEN
LEWIS PRODUCTIONS LP / CD

Skinshape's sixth studio album was recorded between November 2019 and July 2020. It is his second this year and sees him return to the sound captured on 'Filoxiny'.

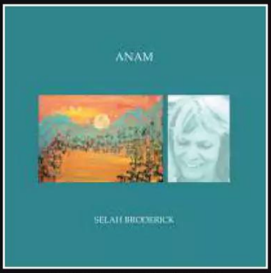
MUCK AND THE MIRES
Greetings From Muckingham Palace

MUCK AND THE MIRES
GREETINGS FROM MUCKINGHAM PALACE
DIRTY WATER LP / CD

MUCK AND THE MIRES and Dirty Water Records raise the garage rock banner high over the palace, proclaiming a new chapter in rock and roll.

THE BATS
FOOTHILLS
FLYING NUN RECORDS LP / CD

The Bats have officially announced their 10th album, Foothills. The 4 piece has created twisted wistful folk, psychedelic rock, bouncy twee pop & everything in between, but whatever the genre, their sound is always distinctively, unmistakably The Bats.



SELAH BRODERICK
ANAM
WESTERN VINYL LP / CD

Traditional and original folk songs are nestled comfortably amongst meditative ambient works on this debut collection by the mother of Heather Woods Broderick and Peter Broderick.

KELLY FINNIGAN
A Joyful Sound

KELLY FINNIGAN
A JOYFUL SOUND
COLEMINE RECORDS LP / CD

With an all-star cast from the current soul scene, Kelly Finnigan has made a future soul classic with his powerful and authentic album, A Joyful Sound!

LEE FIELDS & THE EXPRESSIONS
BIG CROWN VAULTS VOL. 1
BIG CROWN RECORDS LP / CD

A compilation of unreleased Lee Fields & The Expressions tracks from the Special Night and It Rains Love recording sessions.

JENNIFER CASTLE
MONARCH SEASON
PARADISE OF BACHELORS LP / CD

Jennifer Castle's exquisite, moon-suffused Monarch Season, recorded alone in her kitchen on Lake Erie, windows open to the insects, "makes the case for listening as a revolutionary act of intimacy" (Uncut).

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Theories, rants, etc.

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WHEN PEOPLE LOOK BACK ON 2020 in years to come, I doubt it'll be a few album releases they think about first. Nevertheless, as venues remain shuttered, along with so much else of what we normally take for granted, the sustaining value of a long-playing record has become more pronounced than ever. The 75 albums that MOJO's writers have chosen as the best of 2020 for this issue aren't all escapist, or celebratory, or nostalgic for a less complicated world than the current one. They are, though, a great reminder that cultural life endures – and helps us endure – through even the hardest times. Hopefully you'll find some new favourites in this special issue; it's been a good year for our music.

Against the odds, it's been a pretty good year for MOJO, too. Once again, I'd like to thank our tirelessly enthusiastic team for putting together such excellent issues in radically different working conditions; if nothing else, being away from the MOJO office has spared them my Grateful Dead bootlegs. And of course, our sincere gratitude to all of you for remaining so loyal to MOJO in often trying circumstances. For those of you who haven't yet signed up as subscribers, please check out our latest offers at https://www.greatmagazines.co.uk/mojo-magazine.

Until next time, stay safe.

JOHN MULVEY, EDITOR

Suppose he was laughing at fools like us all the time?

I thoroughly enjoyed your interview with John Lydon [MOJO 325]. The candid conversation with Pat Gilbert really captured perhaps John's greatest quality: his authenticity. Throughout his whole career, whilst he may have welcomed the opportunity to wind people up, this was only ever a by-product of holding true to his values. It's also interesting that after nearly 45 years in the public eye he is still considered to be courting controversy with his views on Brexit and Donald Trump, when all he is actually doing is stepping aside from media influence and offering another way of thinking. Though of his own admission John may not be a saint, he is absolutely deserving of our respect.

Craig Isherwood, Poulton Le Fylde, Lancashire

I'd say you were doing something pretty dangerous

Thank you for the lovely Sufjan Stevens article in MOJO 323. There have been few artists that I have discovered in the last 15 or so years that I hold in higher esteem, or that affect me more. I do have a few bones to pick with you, though. Many articles I see on Stevens seem to neglect his All Delighted People EP and you did it as well. The Owl And The Tanager alone merits mention, being one of his most beautiful songs, in my opinion. Bone number two is the omission of his prog-like collaboration, *Planetarium* – another that I think belongs on the list more than, for example, *The Avalanche* or *The BQE*. But, honestly, I am just damn glad you included the article in the first place! When my youngest daughter was around nine, we bonded over, of all things, his song John Wayne Gacy Jr., singing it in the car on the way to school. She went on to love his work in general, which I was very happy about. How many other artists can say a song they wrote about a serial killer had that effect on someone?

Ken Meyer Jr, Santa Ana, California

That sounds like a cheap novelette

I bought a secondhand copy of *Out Of Their Skulls* [MOJO 325]in the mid '80s and loved The Pirates' stripped-back, hard and fast attitude. I knew ➢

≺ they'd been on the same circuit in 1977 as a lot of punk bands and were well appreciated: listening to Milk Cow Blues you can see why – it's blistering. Fast forward to 2005. I see an advert for The Pirates at the Borderline on 23/9. Me, my wife and brother go along. It's only half full. No Frank Farley – unfortunately he was unwell. Four feet away from Mick Green. What a guitarist. Great gig. Never forgotten.

Gavin Alexander, via e-mail

Why didn't you say all this at the inquest?

I have enjoyed reading MOJO since the first edition with Lennon and Dylan back in November 1993. Regarding MOJO 323, I certainly agree that *Rubber Soul* was indeed a masterpiece from The Beatles, but not the first in my humble opinion. That belongs to *A Hard Day's Night*. Whilst the lyrical content was not of the maturity of *Rubber Soul*, the music certainly was. It was a fantastic pop album and – let's not forget – they were a pop group at the time. I was fortunate enough to see them in concert in 1963 before the mania started.

Chris Gibbens, Brighton

I'm not a sheriff and you aren't a cowboy

When oh when will we get a feature on Endless Boogie and Paul Major? Love the magazine, although it would be nice to go 12 issues without yet another piece on The Beatles.

Lee Jefferies, Coulsdon

I was never so lonesome in my life 'til he showed up

The passing of Spencer Davis is a chunk of my childhood cut away. I bought the first three albums of The Spencer Davis Group when they were released – albums that still retain a regular place on my turntable. He provided a love of folk, R&B and blues to what were one of my favourite groups. And by recruiting and influencing the musical tastes of one of the great popular singers and multi-instrumentalists, he was a conduit for Steve Winwood to shine.

Thank you for the music, Spencer.

Mick Donovan, via e-mail

As soon as I get to the bottom of this, I'll get the next plane

Susan Rogers claims that it's astonishing that one man [Prince] could create two masterpieces in four years [MOJO 323]. Clearly she hasn't discovered Dylan '65/66!

Phil Redmond, via e-mail

All strangers to the place and none of them could speak the same language

Further to your piece on Glastonbury Fayre [MOJO 323] and the letter in MOJO 324 about Isle Of Wight 1970, I would like to add my contribution regarding the sometimes overlooked Hollywood Music Festival on May Bank Holiday 1970 at Leycett near Newcastle-Under-Lyme. This was my first festival, with a school friend whose mother drove us there. I was so excited when I first saw the flags and tents by the entrance area. The festival was part-sponsored by Red Bus Company and Dawn Records, and some of their acts like Titus Groan and Demon Fuzz appeared. Famously, Trader Horne did not, as they disbanded there. I actually enjoyed these lesser known acts along with Quintessence and Wildmouth. The line-up, though, was great: Ginger Baker's Airforce, Traffic, Jose Feliciano, Tony Joe White, Family, Colosseum, Free, Black Sabbath and the first ever European appearance by the Grateful Dead, who played for four hours. Another little-known band called Mungo Jerry were called back for the second day, such was their impact on the first. The crowd sang along and banged drink cans. I still have the souvenir programme and also the NME with their review the week after. What a weekend! And the site was left clean and tidy, the weather was stunning and the atmosphere was conflict-free.

Terry Maunder, Leeds

I'm just a hack writer who drinks too much and falls in love with girls

Another instant classic [MOJO 323], with the *Goats Head Soup*, *Rubber Soul* and James Taylor interviews. Regarding the mention of the Lester Bangs essay "James Taylor Marked For Death" in Colin Irwin's chat, has anyone found the Glock pointed at Lester's head that forced him to listen to JT? Bangs was nothing more than a needlessly-published slob with opinions, especially that 1971 drivel which was textbook projection. Rock's true enemies weren't the James Taylors of the biz; rather, they were the critics insisting the genre adhere to their set of uncool-dad rules.

Gary Moore, Louisville, Kentucky

I'd say stick to fiction, straight fiction.

In the Simeon Coxe obituary in MOJO 325, we referred to Jimi Hendrix playing The Star-Spangled Banner in 1968: this should of course have been 1969. And when Andrew Weatherall remixed The Silver Apples' The Edge Of Wonder in 2019, the original track dated from 2012, not 1968 as stated.

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WHAT GOES ON!

THE HOT NEWS AND BIZARRE STORIES FROM PLANET MOJO

Destruction time again: the original Damned wreak havoc on TV show Supersonic, 1977 (from left) Rat Scabies, Captain Sensible, Dave Vanian, Brian James; (insets right) the reunited James, Vanian, Scabies and Sensible today; (and top right) Sensible Gray Cells say hello (from left) Sensible, Paul Gray, Marty Love.

Damned, Right

The '76-era line up of Scabies, James, Sensible and Vanian are back! But how?

NEW ROSE BY The Damned – AKA the first British punk 45 – was released on October 22, 1976. Almost 44 years later to the day, on October 21, London's Roundhouse played host to a socially distanced press conference to announce the reformation of the original group for a UK tour in July 2021.

Hosted by Don Letts, the matter-of-fact event belied its unexpected nature. Such were the historic business and personal differences within the ranks that bassist/guitarist Captain Sensible once quipped in MOJO that if the primal quartet of himself, guitarist/songwriter Brian James, drummer Rat Scabies and frontman Dave Vanian should ever again be in the same room, not all might emerge alive.

Yet today all was cordiality. They'd be playing "the early stuff that we all played together," James confirmed. "It's probably the worst time to get a band back together, but here we are," said Vanian. "I owe my whole career to Brian, in a way, and Rat, for pulling me into the band in the first place." "I've enough regrets in my life," said Rat. "This is one I'm really pleased I'm not going to have." Of the creative tension that saw them first split in 1978 after second album *Music For Pleasure*, the drummer added, "That was why the band worked… we all thought we were the best one and there was always competition."

Captain Sensible, the self-professed "optimistic side of The Damned", is in buoyant mood when speaking to MOJO two days later. This month his band Sensible Gray Cells – which includes current Damned bassist Paul Gray and Johnny Moped drummer Marty Love – release their second album, *Get Back Into The World*. Driven, variously, by their love of classic pop and '60s garage psychedelia, Captain declares the material, "too melodic for The Damned. Some of the songs are insanely catchy. And it's a concept album!" Subjects include Trump, matrimony, Prince Andrew and, on Don't Say I Didn't Warn Ya, certain health concerns of the mature punk rocker. Does this apply to The Damned?

> **"It's not going to take a vast amount of rehearsing, is it?"**
> **CAPTAIN SENSIBLE**

"It's a band that exploded with all the energy of punk rock, and the next thing, it's 44 years on," he reflects. "There's regret that you're not young any more, 'cos those days were bloody magnificent, even if all the hilarious booze-fuelled camaraderie and the rest of it have taken their toll on our festering carcasses.

"Now is pretty much the time," he adds, "regardless of any viruses or anything, because the four of us are still alive. It's not just because the fans are always on at us, it's for ourselves as well. I've got a lot of respect for those guys, despite any disagreements we've had. No one else plays like them. You'll know a Rat Scabies drum track. Brian James is the greatest guitar player of his generation. So it's pretty exciting for me – I wanna hear the noise we make through a big PA, and hear those songs the way they should be played. I've been doing cover versions of that material for years! Brian knows how the guitars should go."

He says in-band peace has been maintained by avoiding, "any unpleasantness – we're old now and it was all years ago. And it's not going to take a vast amount of rehearsing, is it?" He adds that new recordings have not been discussed and the reunion will be a one-time thing. "I know the ticket prices are quite high and people have complained, and I've resisted the temptation to remind them that Elton and the Stones go out for much more than that… I mean, if Elton John's worth fucking 80 quid a ticket, so are we! We're better than that cunt anyway!"

Ian Harrison

The Damned play London, Birmingham, Glasgow and Manchester in July 2021. Sensible Gray Cells' Get Back Into The World is released by Damaged Goods.

Getty, Alison Wonderland, Reuters

PUT
YOUR
HANDS
IN THE
AIR
RESIST
PHONY
ENCORES!
RESIST PHONY ENCORES!
APPLAUSE!

It's a sign: poster boy Gruff Rhys in Cambridge in 2019; (insets) the book and a look within.

GRUFF RHYS WIELDS HIS CUE CARDS AND PRAISES LIVE GIGS IN RESIST PHONY ENCORES!

IN SEPTEMBER 2018, Gruff Rhys presented Resist Phony Encores! at 2018's Edinburgh Festival, a semi-comical, PowerPoint-assisted diatribe with an underlying purpose. “I wanted to make sense of audiences and why people enjoy music,” explains the ex-Super Furry Animal and solo-singer-raconteur. “Scientific experiments confirm the physical and emotional well-being of attending live concerts.”

Rhys couldn't have known a pandemic would deprive audiences of such life-enhancing endorphins. Nor that he would be taking six months out at home in Cardiff. Yet lockdown was also his “first break from playing live in 10 years – I had the chance to think about crowds, to take it all in.”

Rhys also had more time in which to update and finish the book version of Resist Phony Encores!, a fascinating and mirthful trip into one musician's maverick mind and the mutually beneficial artist/audience relationship. It mirrors the stage show's reliance on graphics, namely the outsized cue cards he's employed on-stage for over a decade: such as ‘APPLAUSE!’, ‘LOUDER!’ and ‘BREXIT IS A BAD SAX SOLO’.

This device has, he says, allowed him to circumvent the banter and posturing of rock frontman performance. He cites The Velvet Underground's '90s reunion as an example of, “where I'm coming from. Lou Reed making stadium rock gestures was heart-breaking for me.” While not a fan of “direct commands” from the stage (“I don't want to feel like I'm in school”), Rhys nevertheless issues them by way of signs. “I want the audience to feel part of things, rather than some unhealthy domineering relationship,” he reasons. “I was amazed how effective it was when I used the cards.”

The book contains several ripe anecdotes, such as the time Rhys appeared alongside his hero Sir Paul McCartney at one of Damon Albarn's Africa Express events. Feeling that cue cards could up the ante, Rhys handed the one marked ‘WOAH!’ to Albarn, who inexplicably flipped it over to reveal ‘TAX THE RICH’ (McCartney's surprised reaction was captured on camera). “When things go wrong,” Rhys muses, “they're often the most memorable shows. My attitude to playing live has changed a lot; I now find it exhilarating.”

Rhys has played only one show since March, on guitar for his Guinean friend N'famady Kouyaté at a carnival in Cardiff Bay, “when things were at their loosest, in the summer. People were dancing, like for the first time, trying to make sense of their limbs.” Recording-wise, Rhys finished a new “louder” album in summer 2019 (he won't reveal title or concept), but he doesn't think it'll be out 'til next summer: “the way things are, I'm in no hurry.” He's still writing and demoing, “but it's hard to get ideas together. Everyone's in the same boat. It's almost beyond worry.”

> “Everyone's in the same boat. It's almost beyond worry.”
> **GRUFF RHYS**

One aspect has irrevocably changed since lockdown. “I won't take gigs for granted any more,” Rhys avers. “This time last year, Nile Rodgers played Cardiff Castle – like, wow! But I didn't even think of going. If he was there tomorrow, I'd be there like a shot.”

Martin Aston

Resist Phony Encores! via Hat & Beard Press (February 9, 2021).

GIMME FIVE... GREASY SOUNDS

Andre Williams
The Greasy Chicken
(FORTUNE, 1957)

Top wino R&B laffs, with whacky sound effects and accents, from the storied survivor of the blues. The follow-up to his 1956 hit Bacon Fat, this predates 1968's also-gas-tric-juicy Pig Snoots, which he released as the Natural Bridge Bunch.

Ancient Grease
Mother Grease The Cat
(MERCURY, 1970)

Hard bluesy rock with progressive tendencies from South Wales: trippy lyrics about finding true reality – “Aphrodite dressed in rainbows, pass the wine,” don't mind if we do – but nothing, sadly, about getting your mum to slather Tiddles in unguents.

Atomic Rooster
Nice'N'Greasy
(DAWN, 1973)

What made grease the dream in the '70s? The Grease Band, Greasy Truckers, *Ma Kelly's Greasy Spoon*… anyway, here Atomic Rooster's soulful blues rock comes in a lovely fag-stubbed-out-in-a-fried-egg sleeve. DO NOT look at the German cover.

Royal Trux
Sunshine And Grease
(DOMINO, 2000)

Like a pop-eyed love note from a stalker in jail, this is proper vomitous Trux goodness, with a reggae beat, a nod to Michael Jackson and two rival vocal tracks on top of each other (the complete Herrema/Hagerty creative chemistry in a nutshell).

Uncle Dave Macon
Keep My Skillet Good And Greasy
(VOCALION, 1924)

Banjo king relates chickens, whiskey and bloodhounds to a well-oiled pan. And don't forget Les McCann Ltd's *Bucket O'Grease*, Tower Of Power's *East Bay Grease* or *Groove Grease* by Jimmy McGriff.

Getty

THESE NEW PURITANS

HIÐÐEN

"ASTONISHING…THERE ARE MORE IDEAS HERE THAN MOST BANDS MANAGE IN AN ENTIRE CAREER"
★★★★ – THE TIMES

"HIDDEN IS NOT JUST THE MOST ORIGINAL RECORD TO EMERGE FROM BRITAIN THIS YEAR, BUT THE MOST UNFATHOMABLE: AN IMMACULATE ENIGMA"
★★★★★ – THE GUARDIAN

"IT'S AS MUCH A PUZZLE AS AN ATTACK: A FASCINATING, FOREBODING, INSISTENTLY RHYTHMIC CONUNDRUM"
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"No synth pads!": Marianne Faithfull with "genius collaborator" Warren Ellis.

POST-COVID, MARIANNE FAITHFULL AND WARREN ELLIS CHANNEL BYRON AND SHELLEY

MARIANNE FAITHFULL'S forthcoming album interprets the 19th century British Romantic poets, assisted by Bad Seeds multi-instrumentalist Warren Ellis and producer Head. Yet it very nearly didn't come to pass. In early April, just weeks into lockdown, the singer spent three weeks in hospital with Covid-19.

In her first interview since recovery, Faithfull admits she's still feeling the after-shocks. "I really hurt my lungs," she says. "This, after smoking most of my life and having emphysema. And my short-term memory is affected. But I'm told that when you have coronavirus as badly as I did, that happens. But your memory comes back, and mine *is* coming back. And my lungs are coming back too. And I've made a beautiful record."

> "Your memory comes back… my lungs are coming back too."
> **MARIANNE FAITHFULL**

She Walks In Beauty – named after Lord Byron's portrait of immediate infatuation – was first discussed in 2019, after Ellis and Head had midwifed Faithfull's twentieth solo album *Negative Capability*. But the new album's roots go deeper: to her education at St Joseph's Convent School in Reading, to be precise. "I had a wonderful, inspirational English teacher called Mrs Simpson," Faithfull recalls. "Not a nun, obviously. She introduced me to the English Romantics. I had to leave it all behind in order to be a pop singer, but I never forgot them."

Unable to meet up with her "fucking genius" collaborators, Faithfull recorded seven poems at home in Putney before Ellis added neo-classical arrangements at his Paris base. Brian Eno (arrangements and treatments), Nick Cave (piano) and Vincent Ségal (cello) also feature. Faithfull had only one demand: "No synth pads!"

"They had to come off," says Faithfull, who brings into the conversation her late friend and former producer Hal Willner, who succumbed to Covid on April 7. "His death broke my heart," she says. "And I so wanted to talk to Hal, to ask advice and play him tracks. And in a way, we did talk, and his message was – no synth pads!"

While Faithfull was able to record four more poems – in all, the album features three poems by Keats, two apiece by Shelley, Wordsworth and Byron, and one each from Thomas Hood and Alfred, Lord Tennyson – she couldn't sing Byron's So We'll Go No More A Roving as she'd wanted. "The poem has been set to music before – Joan Baez sang it. Speaking it, I can hear all my pain. I think I'll get my voice back. I just have to practise."

Given what Faithfull has already survived – heroin addiction, breast cancer, hepatitis and suicide attempts among them – you wouldn't bet against the restoration of that commanding instrument. "I'm still working, still writing," she says. "I'm still on the planet. I wish Mrs Simpson was still on the planet too, so she could hear my album."

Martin Aston

She Walks In Beauty will be out early in 2021.

FACT SHEET

Title: *She Walks In Beauty*
Due: early 2021
Production: Warren Ellis and Head
Songs: She Walks In Beauty; To The Moon; Ozymandias; The Bridge Of Sighs
The Buzz: "I'm so proud of this record, I would have dragged myself off my death bed to talk to you."
Marianne Faithfull

ALSO WORKING

…announcing last month that he'd left Motown after 59 years to sign a deal with Republic Records, **STEVIE WONDER** (right) announced that his new LP will be entitled *Through The Eyes Of Wonder*. He also spoke of possibly releasing a collection for his mother, *Gospel Inspired By Lula*, through Motown …a YouTube clip posted by photographer Mick Steff in October showed **DURUTTI COLUMN** mastermind **Vini Reilly** at home in Manchester, improvising on his Fender Strat. Said Vini, who suffered a stroke in 2010, "as flawed as it is technically… it's a lot better than it has been." MOJO understands that socially distanced recordings for a new album have been made …speaking to Guitar.com, **IDLES' Lee Kiernan** said they'd already begun their next record. "There's, like, 30 songs," he revealed. "We want to find what this album means to us, what it's going to be, and that takes time" …having recently released a cover of Heaven 17's (We Don't Need This) Fascist Groove Thang in time for the US presidential elections, Philadelphia punk vets **THE DEAD MILKMEN** will release a new LP next year …speaking to Interview magazine, **MILEY CYRUS** said she's making an LP of **Metallica** covers …GQ reports that **SADE** (left) is working on new songs at her Gloucestershire home. "When it comes to making music nothing has changed," her keyboard player **Andrew Hale** told Dylan Jones. The group were "still wanting to write a better song, still easy in other's company, still laughing at the same jokes…"

Getty (2)

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Always in a stew: RZA adds spice to Wu-Tang Clan.

RZA

Wu-Tang Clan's Abbot talks movies, calamities and rap-masks.

WHEN RZA's first brush with fame as Prince Rakeem flopped in the early '90s, the Wu-Tang Clan's visionary producer set about swarming the rap industry with a nine-strong band of what he calls "killer bees", including cousins GZA and late wildcard Ol' Dirty Bastard. A dyed-in-wool film fanatic, RZA now juggles authorial control of the sprawling Wu empire with another career as a director. Zooming from home in California, the erudite polymath expands on how his hyper-taut third film Cut Throat City's fable, about childhood friends forced into crime to survive, has powerful parallels to his own career.

What was it about Paul Cuschieri's script that drew you to Cut Throat City?

The story about these young men seeing their aspirations turn into desperations, in the backdrop of Hurricane Katrina, related to me. The fun is always finding the piece of the story that relates to your life – that spoonful of soul you put in goes a long way. The physicality of going from a hip-hop producer to a film-maker is something else. My first film [2012's The Man With The Iron Fists] was like going to the gym with a trainer when you rip every muscle and you're sore for years. But this time I was so there, so zen on it.

Do you pinch yourself that you're making movies now?

Yeah! Why not? Films saved my life. That sounds kinda bug, but it's true. One of the first five films I ever watched was The Swarm with Michael Caine. That's why killer bees are part of my psyche. Same with Star Wars, the spirituality of The Force. Film has the power to have you escape the world you're in and be inspired. In Star Trek Captain Kirk had his flip-phone, right? We all have one in our pockets now.

WU CHEER

RZA's hits from the Tang

1 Glaciers Of Ice *Raekwon* (FROM *ONLY BUILT 4 CUBAN LINX…*, LOUD 1995)

2 Rainy Days *Raekwon* (FROM *ONLY BUILT 4 CUBAN LINX…*, LOUD 1995)

3 4th Chamber *GZA* (FROM *LIQUID SWORDS*, GEFFEN, 1995)

4 Killa Hill 10304 *GZA* (FROM *LIQUID SWORDS*, GEFFEN, 1995)

5 Shimmy Shimmy Ya *Ol' Dirty Bastard* (FROM *RETURN TO THE 36 CHAMBERS: THE DIRTY VERSION*, ELEKTRA, 1995)

Is it true you trademarked Wu-Tang back in 1991?

Yeah. I realised I had to form a corporation. I had a great calamity in my life and I decided to sober up and study. It made me realise what I could do for myself. I love Daniel Day-Lewis in There Will Be Blood. The opening scene is one man in a hole, he's digging and digging, he falls down, breaks his leg, whatever, but he's going for self. And by going for self he builds an empire.

What do you mean by calamity?

I was involved in street crime, and although it was self-defence, I got into some gun violence. Then I was facing the system – eight years in jail, minimum, and being black don't help 'cos black men don't go to trial. My sister put up her life savings to bail me out, my brother put food on the table and my mother put up the house so I could get a lawyer. Everybody sacrificed so that Bobby [Robert Diggs, RZA's birth name] could have a second chance. And my second chance led to a second chance for dozens of young men.

In 2004's The Wu-Tang Manual you laid out your plan to revolutionise the rap industry. Was that a massive leap of faith?

I did my studying. I didn't look at what happened to me as Prince Rakeem as a loss. I joined GZA on tour with Big Daddy Kane and Kool G Rap for a few stops [in 1991] but had to go home 'cos he didn't have enough budget. We didn't have no power. I asked, "How do we defeat that?" So, we either move all as one or nobody moves at all.

We're all wearing masks these days, but they proved to be useful accessories for Wu-Tang early on.

Hahahahaha! Very useful! It was always hard to assemble everybody on time. Everybody would be there, but for the time allotted for the photographer? No! [Several Clan members were replaced by masked stand-ins on 1993 debut *Enter The Wu-Tang (36 Chambers)'s* cover.]

> "Captain Kirk had his flip-phone… we all have one now."
> **RZA**

Tell us something you've never told an interviewer before.

I make a great stew. My wife loves it. Even as a vegan I've got some serious kitchen skills. I arrange my spices on the cutting board in a layer, then finely chop garlic and cilantro together, so the liquid all mixes. I make at least two handfuls and it becomes my seasoning for the next two weeks.

Andy Cowan

Cut Throat City is available on Digital Download now.

"He's special."
- Evening Standard

"The real deal."
- The Guardian

Title: STARTING OVER

By: CHRIS STAPLETON

THE NEW ALBUM

NOVEMBER 13TH

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JULIEN TEMPLE REVEALS ALL ABOUT SHANE MACGOWAN DOC CROCK OF GOLD

WHEN DIRECTOR Julien Temple agreed to make a film about The Pogues' irascible frontman Shane MacGowan, now 62 and wheelchair-bound, he was determined it wouldn't be your standard-issue 'rockumentary'. What he didn't predict, however, was it becoming more like wildlife photography.

"It was like David Attenborough filming a snow leopard," laughs Temple. "He just wouldn't turn up. Once we waited three days for him in Tipperary, but he chose to stay in a pub five miles away. But the fact Shane made it difficult forced the film-making to be more imaginative and inventive."

And inventive Crock Of Gold: A Few Rounds With Shane MacGowan certainly is. Robbed of a conventional commentary from its subject – "the first thing Shane said to me was, 'I'm not doing any fucking interviews,'" says Temple – the singer's journey from Westminster School rebel to punk scenester to dissolute, IRA-supporting superstar is told via dreamlike reconstructions, cartoon animation, vintage interviews and concert footage, and, crucially, informal conversations between MacGowan and three selected friends: former Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams, actor Johnny Depp (also one of the film's producers) and Primal Scream's Bobby Gillespie.

"Those people brought out different aspects of Shane," explains Temple, who also scooped fascinating interviews with MacGowan's sister Siobhan and father Maurice (though the other Pogues "refused to do it"). "With Gerry Adams, he looked up to him with admiration, as a commander; they'd talk about Irish history and literature. With Bobby Gillespie he comes across like a mob capo, verbally dangerous, his mood turning on a sixpence; with Johnny Depp he's more of an equal. But it wasn't easy: with Johnny, I shot eight and a half hours of footage but used three minutes."

Revelations about MacGowan's early life include his drug-triggered mental disintegration as a pre-punk teenager, leading to a spell in an institution he calls 'Bedlam', and his difficulties reconciling a middle-class Home Counties upbringing with his Irish roots.

"That connection to Ireland is vital," says the director, who includes his 1976 filmed interview with a peroxide punk MacGowan. "Not just Irish literature, but the struggle for independence. That contradiction – the Irishness but the London-ness; he's British but he hates the British. I knew he had a bad rep, but I also didn't know how friendly and generous he can be as well. The spectrum of Shane is pretty immense. He's a fascinating, impressive guy."

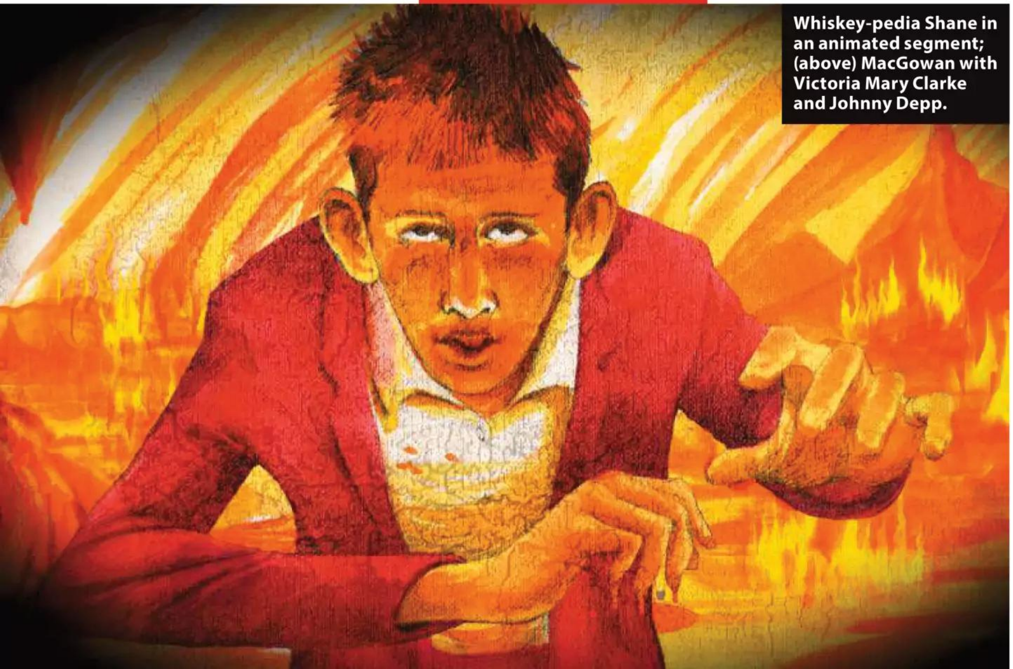
In other Shane news, according to a report in the Irish Sun, earlier this year the singer recorded five tracks for a new solo album with musician brothers Johnny and Mick Cronin; they described the songs as "raw timeless punk". In 2018 the paper also announced that a MacGowan biopic, starring Barry Keoghan in the leading role, was in production: Shane's wife Victoria Mary Clarke said he'd be recording music for the soundtrack. More immediately, MacGowan biography A Furious Devotion, written by author Richard Balls, is out in 2021 via Omnibus Press.

Pat Gilbert

Crock Of Gold: A Few Rounds With Shane MacGowan is released in UK cinemas on November 20 and on DVD and digital formats from December 7.

"He's British but he hates the British."
JULIEN TEMPLE

Greg Williams, Jason Thrasher



Whiskey-pedia Shane in an animated segment; (above) MacGowan with Victoria Mary Clarke and Johnny Depp.

LAST NIGHT A RECORD CHANGED MY LIFE

Patterson Hood

Drive-By Trucker digs **Big Star's *Radio City*** (Ardent, 1974).

The first Big Star album I bought was a double CD of *#1 Record* and *Radio City* in 1992. Rykodisc had released *Third/Sister Lovers* separately, so I bought all three albums the same day, and that was my soundtrack for a year. They're perfect, but if I have to boil it down to just one then *Radio City* gets me the most.

A friend in my hometown Florence, Alabama had turned me onto them as a teenager when he played *Radio City* after some Kinks round at his house. Hearing September Gurls the first time, I just thought it the most perfect pop song imaginable. I love powerpop and I love punk, and *Radio City* hits the sweet spot in the middle. Their Southern slant on being Anglophiles is really important to me, that Memphis booty swing that a lot of white powerpop doesn't have. If I could write a pop song like September Gurls I would. It's not for lack of trying. I sometimes cover it solo, Kanga Roo, too, but you've got to have someone who can play that cowbell just right.

When I was putting together Drive-By Truckers I moved to Athens, Georgia. I was the sound guy in the High Hat club and organised a Big Star tribute show. Word got round, and pretty soon Mike Mills wanted in. Mike called Jody Stephens who came over to play drums with him, so we ended up with this Big Star tribute with an Actual Member Of Big Star. I'd met Jody before I even I bought those Big Star CDs. The manager of my first band with Mike Cooley, Adam's House Cat, was friends with Jody and he'd come see us play in Memphis.

They should have been so successful, but radio was changing and they didn't play out a lot. I was shocked at how few Big Star shows there were. There was no underground back then. And with their personalities I'm not sure how well they would've gotten along in a van.

As told to Andy Fyfe

Drive-By Truckers' new album The New OK is out on December 18.

Radio City Big Star

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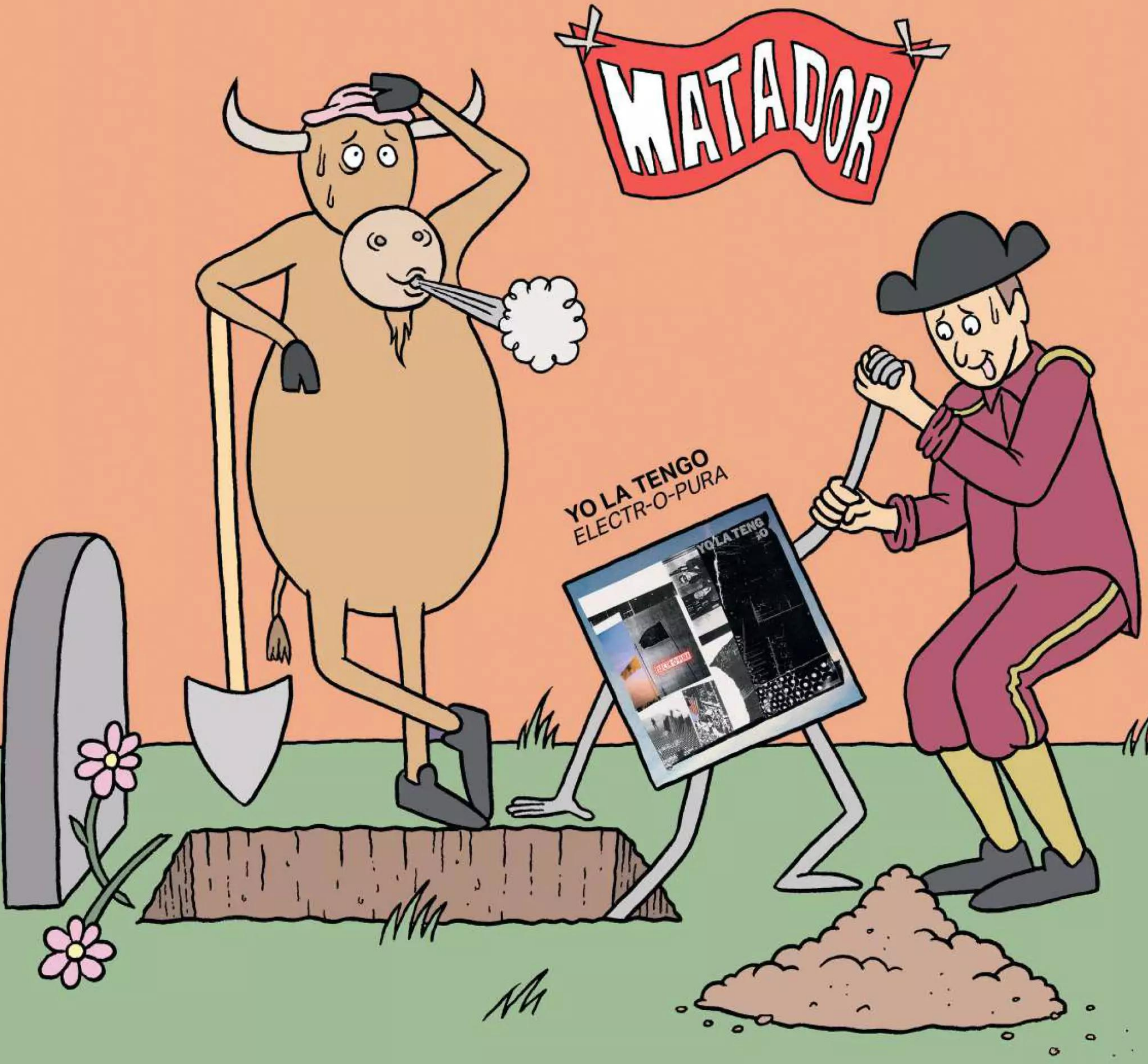
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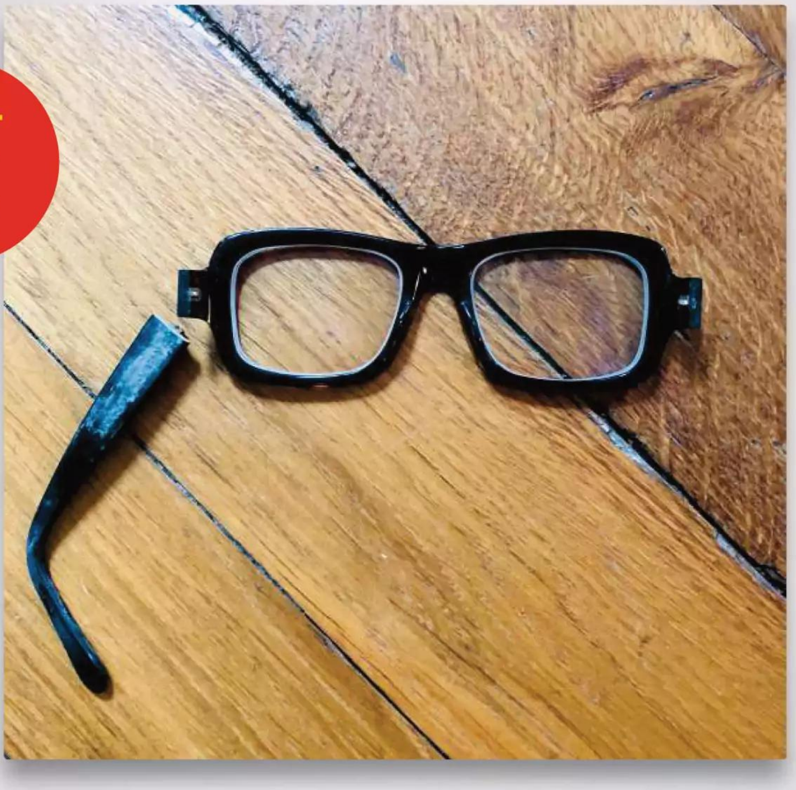
THE BEST OF 2020



Making spectacles of himself: Jarvis Cocker by Jarvis Cocker.

JARVIS COCKER

> "I cycled to Richmond Park and sat with some deer."
> **JARVIS COCKER**

Pulp's evolving original in his own words and by his own hand.

I'd describe myself as a… short-sighted musician from the north of England, is my standard description. You could add, who likes to sleep a lot.

Music changed me because… it's what I decided to spend my life doing. My mother always had the radio on, and the pop radio of the '60s was there from the off. That's gone deep in my consciousness, I think. I wanted to be an astronaut, but I swapped that for being a pop star because of The Monkees on telly.

When I'm not making music… I enjoy cycling. I cycled to Richmond Park on my birthday and sat with some deer. But I've never knowingly worn Lycra.

My biggest vice is… online Scrabble, on my phone. I don't play against other people, just the computer. I have it on intermediate, not easy and not super-hard, but I can beat the computer, and in this day and age that feels like a massive victory.

The last time I felt embarrassed was… when [current project] Jarv Is were touring the West Coast of America about a year and a half ago. We were playing the only old Pulp song we play, His & Hers, and in the middle I talk to the audience about their phobias or fears. I asked this bloke what his was and he said "Trout." I launched into this whole thing about trout, when I got off-stage the band were laughing. They said, "He didn't say 'trout,' he said 'Trump.'"

My formal qualifications are… 10 O-levels, four A-levels and a BA in Fine Art that I got from St Martin's – I'm still feeling the benefit of that every day.

The last time I cried was… two days ago. I'd been asked to go on Jools Holland's Later…, and they give you an A-to-Z list of everybody who's ever been on. I watched Jonathan Richman doing a song, Now Is Better Than Before, on a nylon-string guitar. It ended and I just burst into tears.

Vinyl, CD or MP3?… vinyl. It's the perfect form for recorded music. I never think I'm making a CD or a stream. I'll be making a record.

My most prized possession is… there's a birthday card my son made me. I was a bit down, and he wrote a message inside it that was exactly what I needed to hear. The only other physical item I can think of is my guitar. We'd gone on holiday and my mum had started going out with this scuba diving instructor, a German guy, and he asked me what I wanted to do. I said "I really want to be in a band but I haven't got a guitar." He came to visit the next Christmas, and brought this German guitar, a Hopf. None of what's happened since would have happened without that guitar. For most of my career it's the only one I owned: it's really fucked up – a few times I've lost it on-stage and chucked it at somebody, or I've thought, "I don't want to be in a band any more" and I've chucked it at the wall, but it's always been glued back together and it still works.

The best book I've ever read is… pretty impossible to say. One book had quite an effect on me reasonably recently – did you watch that programme on Netflix, Wild Wild Country, about the Bhagwan? I enjoyed it, but it didn't really go into why he amassed such a following. So I tracked down The Book Of The Secrets, transcripts of talks he did in the early '70s. I was half expecting to read a chapter and think, "A load of crap", but it's something I've taken a lot of pleasure from.

Is the glass half full or half empty? …in my post-Bhagwan mindset I've been trying to see beyond the glass. I'm lucky, I keep getting asked to do interesting things. My glass is in danger of overflowing at the moment.

My biggest regret is… just being slow. I wish I'd released more records.

When we die… I'd rather be buried than burnt because at least you're going back to the soil. I would hope that there's a spiritual equivalent where you get recycled, that some energy or whatever goes back to the energy field it came from. Obviously, I've got no idea.

I'd like to be remembered as… if a couple of songs still got played after I've popped it, that'd do me.

As told to Ian Harrison

Jarv Is' Beyond The Pale is out now on Rough Trade.

Daniel Cohen/Lumen Photo

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Equine intervention: Bonny Light Horseman (from left) Eric D Johnson, Anaïs Mitchell, Josh Kaufman.

Nolan Knight

> “We’re making it our own.”
> **ANAÏS MITCHELL**

THE BEST OF 2020

FOLK SUPERGROUP BONNY LIGHT HORSEMAN GET BACK IN THE SADDLE

IN LATE January 2020, the singer, songwriter, and playwright Anaïs Mitchell climbed into a Seattle cab to catch an early-morning flight when she realised that her year – and the world’s, for that matter – was about to change. Two days before, her new trio, Bonny Light Horseman, had released its exquisite self-titled debut – MOJO’s Folk Album Of 2020 – then ended the first brief leg of a Stateside tour ahead of a planned jaunt overseas for a few sets. But on the radio, she learned that the city’s first Covid-19 case had arrived through the very airport where she was headed. “I’m so grateful we had that tour, right under the wire,” she remembers. “We finished it, and then it was, ‘And, scene.’”

Like most every band or thing this year, Bonny Light Horseman scrapped subsequent tour dates and even plans to record a follow-up album. But nearly nine months since Mitchell, Eric D Johnson, and Josh Kaufman were in the same room, their enthusiasm for the project – which reimagines the texts of centuries-old English and American folk standards through arrangements that are graceful, subtle, and sophisticated – remains undiminished.

In fact, Johnson, who has long recorded as Fruit Bats, nearly rented an RV to drive across the country from California to Vermont to record there with Mitchell and Kaufman. The logistics proved to be too much. “Even just hearing their voices on the phone right now, I realise, ‘Oh man, I want to make music with these people,” says Kaufman, the multi-instrumentalist whose credits range from Bob Weir to Taylor Swift. “Our commitment to more music is really strong.”

Adaptability, though, is encoded into Bonny Light Horseman’s origin story. In 2018, the three had only toyed with material and the idea of starting a group, when an invitation arrived to perform at Eaux Claires, the festival belonging to Justin Vernon and Aaron Dessner. When they climbed on stage months later in Wisconsin for the first time, they still didn’t have a name. “It sounds really scary to do a big show on a big stage with songs you just wrote yesterday,” says Johnson. “But I wasn’t nervous at all, because it was a three-person band where everyone was awesome.”

That trust imbues the 10 songs of their self-titled album, rich with harmonies on their imaginative and subversive rendering of Blackwaterside, or deep in wistfulness on their take on Lowlands Away. Friends stop by, too – saxophonist Mike Lewis adds spectral lines to Magpie Nest, while Vernon leads the yearning spiritual Bright Morning Stars as a call-and-response plea. “These songs were the right vehicle for those friendships,” says Mitchell. “We’re making it our own, but we’re never going to own it.”

Grayson Haver Currin

FACT SHEET

- For fans of: Gillian Welch & David Rawlings, Fairport Convention.
- Mitchell’s musical Hadestown – an adaptation of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice’s ill-fated love – won eight Tony Awards in 2019. Its LP-length predecessor, released nearly a decade earlier, features multiple collaborations with Justin Vernon (plus Ani DiFranco, Greg Brown, and the Haden Triplets).
- Bonny Light Horseman’s second release is a 7-inch single cleverly titled Green/Green. The name comes from Green Rocky Road and Greenland Fishery, the two traditional tunes they render in their own prismatic way. Like the trio’s debut, the cover depicts a horse – only, well, a green one.

KEY TRACKS

- Mountain Rain
- The Roving
- Green Rocky Road

UNVEILING 2020'S MOST MYSTERIOUS NEW STARS: SAULT!

AMONG THE lesser-known names who figure in MOJO's Top 75 Albums Of 2020, Sault stand out – not least because they appear in the list twice. Even their biggest fans have struggled to find out much about the London-based retro-future soul collective, who released four albums between May 2019 and September 2020 – the MOJO-endorsed latter pair, *Untitled (Black Is)* and *Untitled (Rise)*, both doubles – while staying defiantly unphotographed and more or less anonymous.

Sault's albums have offered up a mysterious blend of post-punk and disco, warped '70s Afrobeat and '80s electro-soul, along with shades of *What's Going On*-era Marvin Gaye, the drumming of Jaki Liebezeit and the sun-reaching chorales of Rotary Connection. But the only back cover credit on Sault's 2019 debut, *5* – followed four months later by *7* – was for its producer, Inflo, the Michael Kiwanuka studio collaborator whose real name is Dean Josiah Cover, and who was eventually revealed to be the band's ringmaster.

BBC Radio 6 Music DJ Gilles Peterson was an early champion of Sault, buying a copy of *5* after hearing it played in tastemaker Soho record shop, Sounds Of The Universe. "It was really interesting to me," he says, "because it was like a cross between Loose Ends, sort of '80s British music just pre-Soul II Soul, and lopsided American disco."

With each successive release, another layer of mystery has been stripped away, revealing the key Sault members to be west London singer Cleo Sol – whose sadly yearning or gutsy and defiant vocals are often lightly distorted and fed through dubplate reverb – bassist/keyboard player Kadeem Clarke, and Illinois rapper Kid Sister, AKA Melisa Young.

While Sault politely turned down MOJO's request for an interview, Gilles Peterson has his own theory as to why Inflo in particular wishes to avoid the spotlight, citing the producer's media shyness. "I can't speak for him," he stresses, "but he's evidently not interested in doing anything outside of what he's good at in the studio."

On June 19 this year – or Juneteenth, the annual holiday marking the end of slavery in the US – Sault released *Untitled (Black Is)*, a rapid response to the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis only three weeks before. "Take off your badge," Sol sang with cool insistence in the gorgeous Wildfires, "we all know it was murder." Peterson was so blown away by the album that he played it in its entirety that day on his BBC 6 Music show. "I thought, Well, am I just overly excited about it because I'm getting this brand new record handed to me on the day?" he says. "But then I listened to it again and again and again. Not only is it a great response record, it's also full of great songs. You can feel that this is just genuinely pure music."

Tom Doyle

> "This is just genuinely pure music."
> **GILLES PETERSON**

FACT SHEET

- For fans of Khruangbin, Fela Kuti, Rotary Connection.
- Inflo, AKA Dean Josiah Cover's early credits are not quite as auspicious – they include writing and production work for The Kooks and The Saturdays.
- Michael Kiwanuka is listed as featured artist on Bow from *Untitled (Black Is)*, but is audibly unrecognisable, adopting the tones of his Ugandan heritage to shout out to various African nations over spiralling beats.
- While Sault are jaw-droppingly prolific, those still unsated by their four albums are advised to check out Cleo Sol's 2020 Inflo-produced album, *Rose In The Dark* (and excellent quiet storm-styled 2019 standalone single One).

KEY TRACKS

- Masterpiece
- Wildfires
- Little Boy

Power in the darkness: the sleeve for Sault's *Untitled (Black Is)*.

THE BEST OF 2020

MOJO PLAYLIST

Nic Chapman

Unharsh yr buzz with the month's top beats, riffs and chills.

1 JANE WEAVER THE REVOLUTION OF SUPER VISIONS

The Lancs psychonaut's new groove sounds like Bowie's Fashion. The horror party video could be synced with The Winner Takes It All for a #metoo update.

Find it: *YouTube*

2 BILL CALLAHAN & BONNIE 'PRINCE' BILLY WISH YOU WERE GAY

Two songwriting masters tackle the Billie Eilish standard, stoically, while High Llama Sean O'Hagan puts the music on bossa-nova setting. Hot!

Find it: *Bandcamp*

3 SLEAFORD MODS MORK N MINDY (FT BILLY NOMATES)

Value English hip-hop with a slow drip of horrible thoughts. Nomates adds an extra ghoulish dimension.

Find it: *streaming services.*

4 KAREN O & WILLIE NELSON UNDER PRESSURE

Pleasingly unlikely couple reveal Bowie and Freddie's 1981 duet as a true heartbreaker. Like two Bowies in a slow empathy exchange.

Find it: *streaming services*

5 ANDREW CARROLL HERE/NOW

Space-age psych-pop from TV's Lodge 49 soundtracker: think Broadcast retro-futurism in LA.

Find it: *Bandcamp*

6 BLACK COUNTRY, NEW ROAD SCIENCE FAIR

From debut LP *For The First Time*: electric post-rock, high-peak jazz orchestrations and a verge-of-hysteria horror-romance story.

Find it: *streaming services*

7 THE WEATHER STATION ROBBER

Canadian folk poet Tamara Lindeman's supercharged return: double drummer propulsion; free jazz sax; the sweep and grandeur of Unfinished Sympathy.

Find it: *YouTube*

8 TUNE-YARDS NOWHERE, MAN

Merrill Garbus is mad as hell about marginalisation, adding extra verve to her loops 'n' whoops avant-pop.

Find it: *streaming services*

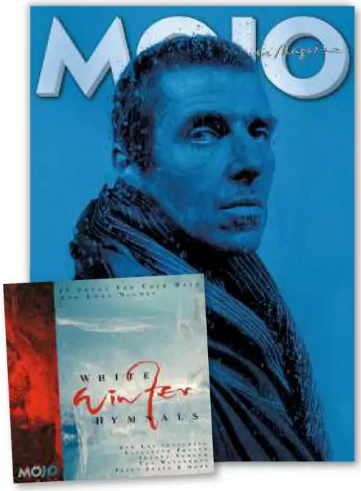
9 BATTLES STIRLING BRIDGE (DJ DAIRY & DJ ORIENT (BLACK MIDI) REMIX)

NYC math-rockers meet London fellow travellers to make fungal-circuitry glitch, ripple and Euro-pop for a rave at Chernobyl.

Find it: *streaming services*

10 PELÉ FEATURING RODRIGO Y GABRIELA ACREDITA NO VÉIO (LISTEN TO THE OLD MAN)

Celebrating his 80th birthday, Brazil's footballing legend and the Mexican nuevo flamenco duo make a hip-swinging tribute to an unidentified senior dude's wisdom.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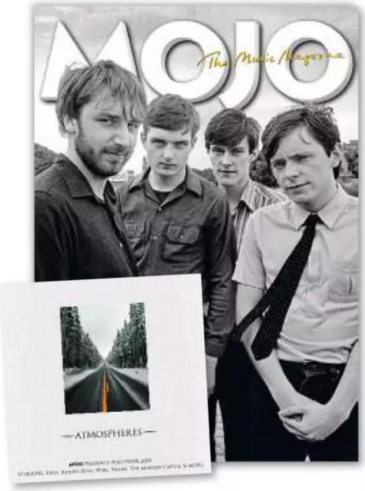
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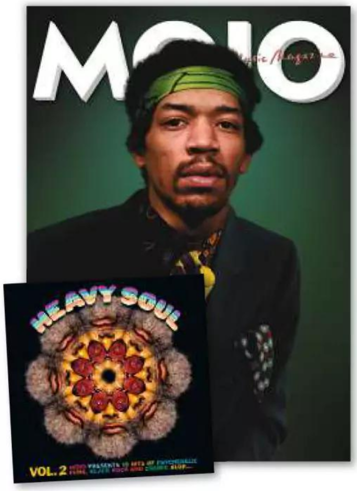
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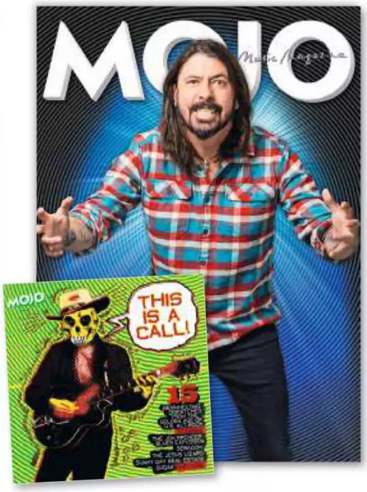
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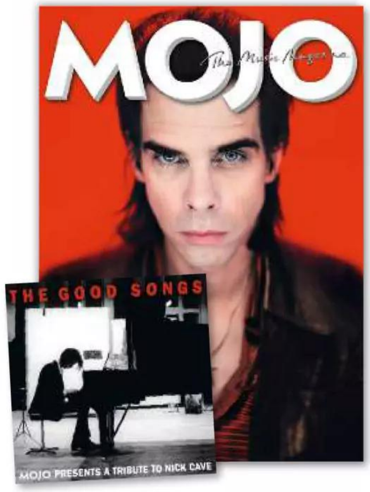
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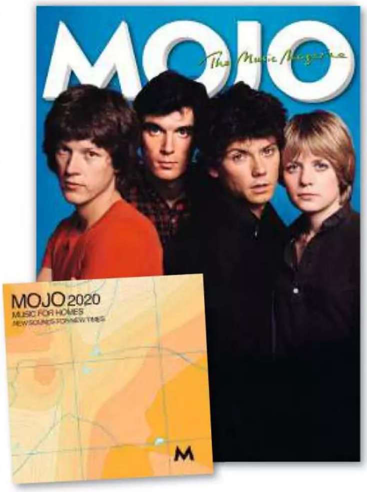
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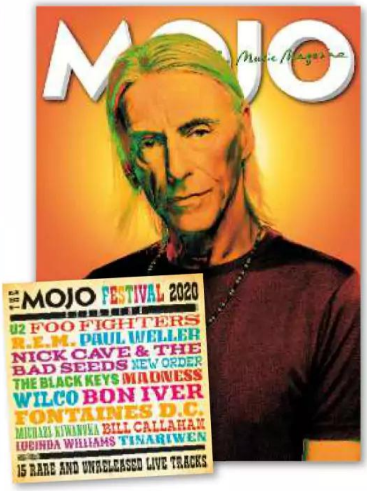
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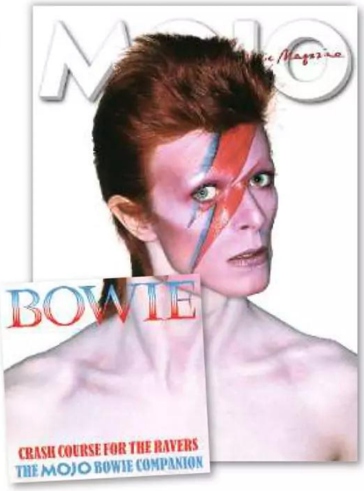
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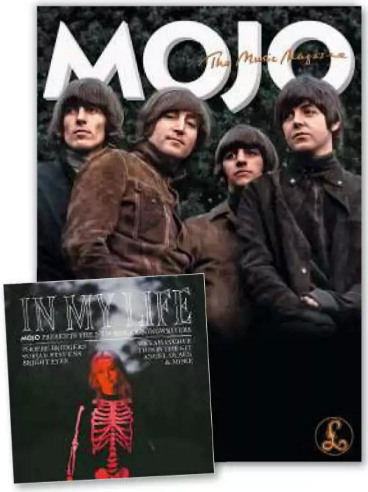
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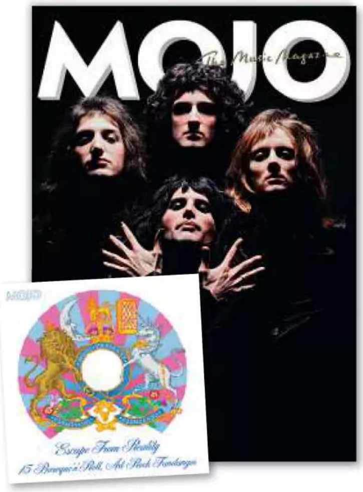
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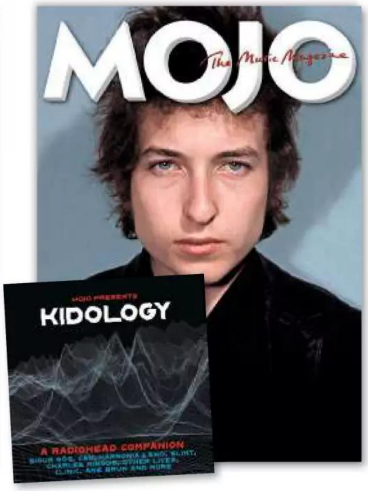
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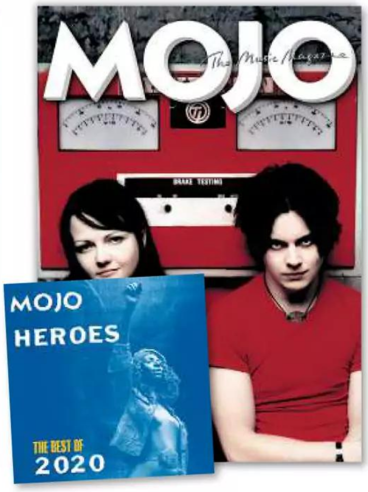
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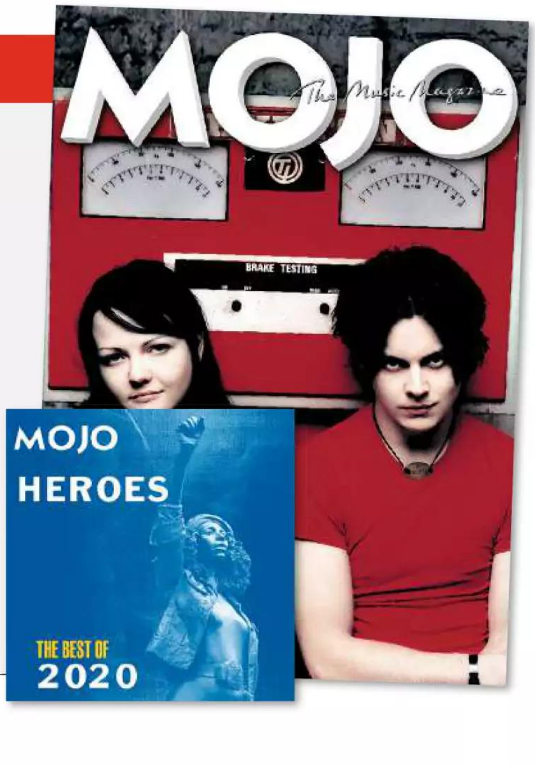
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THE MOJO INTERVIEW

Carrier of **Coltrane's torch**, architect of **"spiritual jazz"**, life for **Pharoah Sanders** has been as **hardscrabble** as his voice is **transcendent**. But at 80, as it was at 20, the aim is the same: **"I just have to make sure I mean every note."**

Interview by **DAVE DiMARTINO** • Portrait by **RACHAEL WRIGHT**

PHAROAH SANDERS DOES NOT CONSENT to a great many interviews. In fact MOJO has lost count of the number of times it has asked for an audience with the legendary saxophonist and been turned down. Sitting in Los Angeles' otherwise deserted Zebulon club in unseasonable 100-degree heat, wearing a straw hat and with his silver beard gathered in a tuft, he explains his elusiveness in soft tones. "Talking, that's very hard to do," he says. "I don't know how to talk about the music. Just let it play."

Sanders has earned the right to approach the media any way he likes. Days away from turning 80, he is still performing with the same passion and spirituality that has marked his career. Just a few days earlier, with a band including fellow saxophonist Azar Lawrence, he filmed a 90-minute live performance in this very venue – to be livestreamed on his October 13 birthday. The actual day of filming, September 23, would have been John Coltrane's 94th. For Sanders, it is a lifelong connection.

After the shoot, Sanders' band and management had gathered around the saxophonist's table and presented him with a birthday cake celebrating "Another Trip Around The Sun". It was a show of warmth and respect for a celebrated jazzman whose dignity off-stage suggests a sternness that doesn't quite materialise, one-on-one. In later conversation, Pharoah Sanders is reserved but surprisingly wry, a contrast with the squealing, exclamatory blasts that punctuate the heartfelt excursions of his horn.

Born Ferrell Sanders, he grew up in a religious household in Little Rock, Arkansas, musically inspired but seeking more. In 1959, he moved to Oakland, California, where he would play blues and R&B, and significantly, just across the bay in San Francisco, he would meet John Coltrane. Later, in New York, he'd join the latter for a string of historic recordings including 1965's bold *Ascension*, before a series of groundbreaking albums as bandleader on the Impulse! label. Sanders' 1969 album *Karma*, specifically the 32-minute track The Creator Has A Master Plan, is revered among today's crop of young guns – including UK combos Maisha and SEED Ensemble (who gathered for a celebration of Sanders' music at London's Barbican Centre earlier this month) – and is often said to have laid the foundation for what is called, for better or for worse, "spiritual jazz".

Post-Impulse!, Sanders made albums fascinating for their cultural diversity, embracing African music, R&B (1977's quiet stormish *Love Will Find A Way* with Phyllis Hyman), and three Bill Laswell-produced collaborations: two for Verve and one in Morocco (*see panel*). He won a Grammy in 1988 for his work on a Coltrane tribute album, went to Africa in the 1990s as part of a US cultural exchange program, and won an NEA Jazz Masters Fellowship in 2016. He keeps on, but, as we'll learn, a living has been hard to maintain.

And so MOJO is brought to a corner table at the Zebulon, air conditioner now thankfully up and running, to settle down with Sanders and Azar Lawrence – the latter to prompt Pharoah stories as needed. The seated Sanders, a cane in his lap, chooses his words carefully. "I don't have nothing I can say too much about what's going on right ➢

WE'RE NOT WORTHY

Son Of Kemet **Shabaka Hutchings** enters into Pharoah's spirit world.

"I came to Pharoah through Coltrane – the first record I heard him on was *Live In Japan* [1966]. I loved his intensity – a very grounded player. He gets to the commonality between African ways of making music. That's what I get from his music – a spiritual activation."

Getty

≺ now," he declares. That he is speaking through a face-covering – as we all are today – makes this encounter even more surreal than expected.

What drew you to music as a child?

Well, really, at that time, it was in church. I tried to go along with singing in church. My mother, she would sing around the house all the time while she was working. I always was really into painting. Music came later on.

What kind of stuff did you paint?

Anything. If someone asked me to do it. I haven't painted in many, many years, in fact.

So, did you start out playing clarinet?

I started playing drums. But I wanted to play an instrument, like a reed, like a saxophone or a clarinet. I wanted to try them all out, somehow. At school, I would mess around with all of them. Trombone, trumpet, all of them. But it was easier for me to play the clarinet. I used to play the drums and sit around in class beating on the desk all the time. They were about to put me out.

What sort of jazz were you hearing when you were a child?

I wasn't hearing *nothing* like that when I was a child, a small child. I wasn't hearing anything. In Arkansas, we didn't have too many jazz stations, we didn't buy records. We didn't have the *money* to buy records.

You moved out to Oakland when you were a bit older. Why?

To get out of Arkansas. It was too racist back there for me. I decided to make a move and come to California.

You started playing professionally in Oakland. What sort of music did you play? R&B, jazz, blues?

Blues. I had to learn to play the blues in all the keys. Sometimes you'd be playing with a guitar player, and a lot of times *they* don't know what key they're in. They'd play a note, and I'd ask them what key or what scale, and they'd tell me, "This one right here." And I'd say, "OK, what is 'this one right here?'" I knew how to play blues scales and stuff like that, the elements of music. So I started playing, I started practising in every key, and I'd play the blues. Sometimes, if you didn't know, you'd be lost and you wouldn't know where to start.

Did those lessons you learned back then stay with you? Do they come into the way you play now?

Yeah, it does a whole lot. I just have to make sure that whatever I play, I mean every note.

I think the first time I ever heard your playing was on the *Live At The Village Vanguard Again* album [1966] with John Coltrane, and I remember your sound being so incredibly fierce and energetic. Was that raw emotionalism always present in your playing from the beginning? How did that develop?

I don't know – I'm *still* going through mouthpieces; they all have a different sound, the mouthpiece and reed combined. I started playing all kinds of mouthpieces, until I felt better. It wasn't easy, because you had to get a good reed to play – and that wasn't easy, especially when I was much younger, because I didn't have the money to buy a reed, so I sometimes had to play the same reed all the time.

You left the West Coast in 1961 and moved to New York. Why did you do that?

Because people were telling me that I should leave and go to New York. They said my sound was "not like" California. "You should go play in New York, learn all the standard songs, get your tuxedo and learn how to work – learn how to live this kind of life."

I understand it was rough financially for you when you first hit New York. How did you make ends meet?

Well, I did all kinds of things. I was homeless for about two-and-a-half years. I used to give blood. I found out you could give blood and make a little change, five dollars or 10 dollars. In New York, you'd try to buy something like a Snickers or a Baby Ruth, a candy bar, and in New York City it wasn't just a nickel – you had to add another penny. Six cents. So like I said, I started going to places where I could give blood, and make some little change money.

I know you got some early work in New York from Sun Ra. Did he suggest you change your name from Ferrell to Pharoah?

No, he never did. He never even mentioned it. I read some interviews, somebody said Sun Ra gave me my name (*chuckles a little*), or something like that. He didn't give me my name. I used that name before we ever even met, before I'd ever even known about who Sun Ra was. My grandmother, she named me from the Bible. At first, she named me "Pharoah", then she decided that might be a little hard, getting along with the system, I guess, so she decided to name me Ferrell. So when I moved to New York, later on, I had to join the musicians' union, and they give you documents to fill out. And one thing I read is that you could have an artist's name, so I decided to put "Pharoah", and that's how that got started. A lot of people used to call me "Rock" or "Little Rock", until I started recording. They found out what my real name was, but they didn't spell it right either – they called me "Pharaoh". They never *did* know my real name, my real first name.

Tell me a bit about what music you liked when you started out, who you liked, who inspired you, who maybe you wouldn't mind emulating.

I was listening to Sonny Rollins a lot – I always

A LIFE IN PICTURES

Spirits rising: Pharoah Sanders.

1 "I don't think I was ready to be playing with John Coltrane." Sanders (left) and Coltrane at the *Ascension* sessions, June 1965.

2 "I always feel like I should get my soprano saxophone out": Pharoah in the studio, 1968.

3 Sanders and Sonny: Pharoah on-stage with guitarist Sonny Sharrock in Berlin, 1968.

4 This creator has a master plan: Pharoah performs during 1974.

5 Sax sidemen: Sanders (right) and Ravi Coltrane on-stage with the McCoy Tyner Quintet, Iridium club, New York, May 2004.

6 Bottoms up: Pharoah blows his bell at the 38th Annual New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, April 2007.

7 Free spirits: Sanders flanked by Joachim Kuhn (left) and Zakir Hussain, Festival Jazz *à la* Villette, Paris, September 2017.

8 Saxophone summit: Pharoah with admirers Kamasi Washington (left) and his father Rickey, May 2016.

9 Journey to the One: "It seemed like people in other countries were far advanced." Sanders performs in Paris, 1986.

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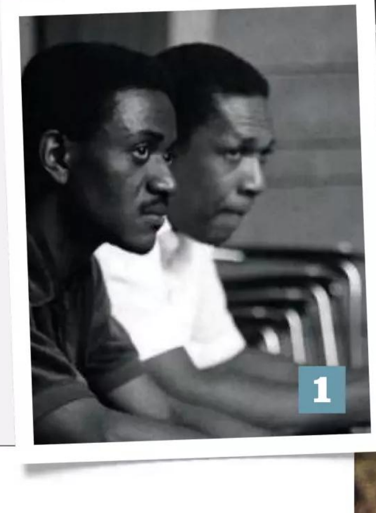
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Chuck Stewart, Getty (5), Alamy, Avalon, Courtesy Kamasi Washington/Twitter

liked the way he popped the notes out of his horns. He had a good punch. I would go home and study just that. How to use my tongue, how to use my lips, breath control.

You have a very intense, emotional sound. What goes on inside when you're playing? Are you angry, are you happy, neither? What's your internal mood?

I don't know. I listen to everything. (*At that moment, a car outside Zebulon honks its horn*) Car horns, the squeaking of a door, I listen to everything. I listen to sounds, lightning and thunder.

Back in the early '60s you were playing with Sun Ra and Don Cherry, people doing avant-garde stuff as opposed to the post-bop coming up at the same time. What sort of feedback did you get from audiences and other musicians?

I was trying to play *everything* at that time. I hadn't had no choice – sometimes you have to do things just to make a little money to put in your pocket to buy some potato chips or some nuts. But I always kept a jar of whole wheatgerm in my suitcase.

When you were starting out, did you pay any attention to what critics were writing about your music? Did you care?

It didn't bother me at all. I'd look at it, and read, and went on from there. I kept on playing and I kept on practising. I wasn't into somebody talking about the way I play or what I do. I knew what I needed to learn, so I kept to doing that.

***Pharoah* [1965], your very first record for ESP Records, was once very rare. Now it can be heard by almost anyone who streams music. I understand you weren't exactly thrilled with the album at the time. What are your thoughts about it now?**

Well, at that time, you're using your talent, and [the label] felt like they liked it, so that's all it meant to me. If they liked it, they liked it. They never paid me no money, but they liked it. So I was still trying to find some jobs around town. One time I played piano at a club and nobody showed up, but I had to play in order to make 10 dollars.

How did you come to join forces with John Coltrane?

> **"I listen to everything.** Car horns, the squeaking of a door… **I listen to sounds, lightning and thunder."**

I don't know. I don't think I was ready to be playing with John Coltrane. I always loved his music and I loved his style of playing. I never felt like I should play more than he played when he hired me – I'd always stand back and let him play more than me. I always wanted to get my *own* band together, but it was hard to do; it was hard to keep a band together. I did many other things. I worked for Macy's for a while, for Macy's warehouse.

After Coltrane died, you made some fascinating records with his widow, Alice. What was that like, what was she like?

Alice? She wanted to keep the music going, you know, and her husband left a whole lot for her to do – it was for her, for whatever she wanted to do. They had three kids, I think, and she had to take care of them, so I'd never talk to her that much. I didn't know her like I knew John. She had called me sometimes for a record date, once in a while ask me would I do something with her.

You released a very impressive and diverse string of albums on Impulse! on your own, starting with *Tauhid*. What was the strategy there, what was the intent?

I was trying to let people know what I can do. I never did get credit on that particular record [*Tauhid*] – because I played alto *and* tenor [it's credited on the CD release]. I guess it sounded like I was playing tenor – they didn't know the difference in pitch or whatever.

How did you select the musicians that appeared on your albums? Were they a working band, or did they come in specifically for the session?

They'd heard me and always had said, "I'd like to play with you sometime, if you need a drummer, a bassist, a piano player, a conga player, I'd love to play." I didn't have no jobs for anybody. But I think they heard me play, and they might've liked something I was doing.

Tell me a bit about working with Leon Thomas [vocalist on The Creator Has A Master Plan].

When I first heard Leon Thomas, there was a place in Manhattan, downtown, called St. Mark's, I think – a jazz club, classical, whatever they'd play. I met [Coltrane drummer] Elvin Jones, he was just sitting there, and Leon Thomas was there, singing, And I asked [Thomas], "Would you mind playing with me on a job?" I was looking to get a job at a

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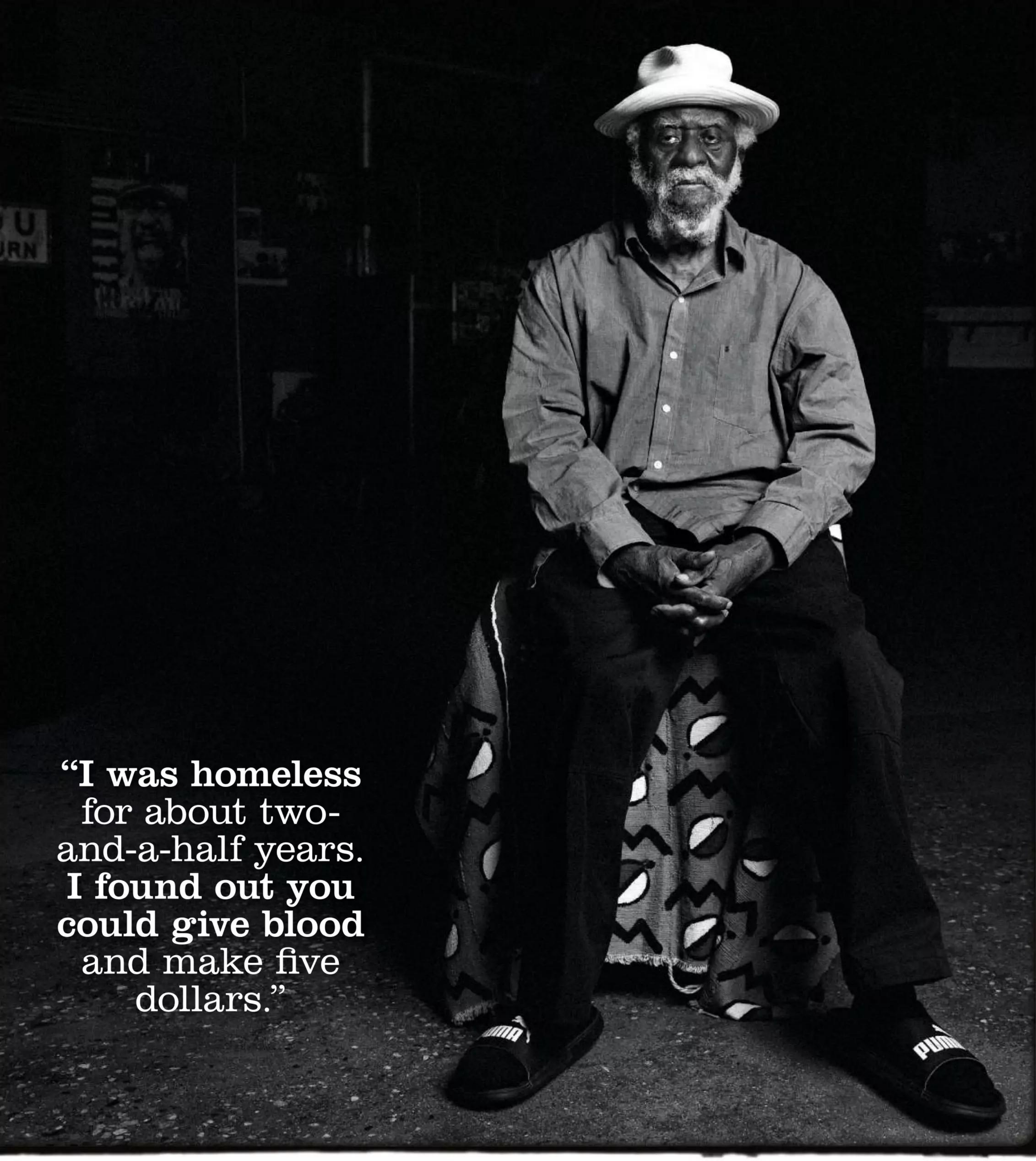


> **"I was homeless** for about two-and-a-half years. **I found out you could give blood** and make five dollars."

club on the East Side called Slugs'. He reminded me so much like an instrument, with his voice, and I wanted to use him. And it seemed like everything went well; he decided to work with me for a while.

Artistically, how appreciated did you feel? Were people listening?

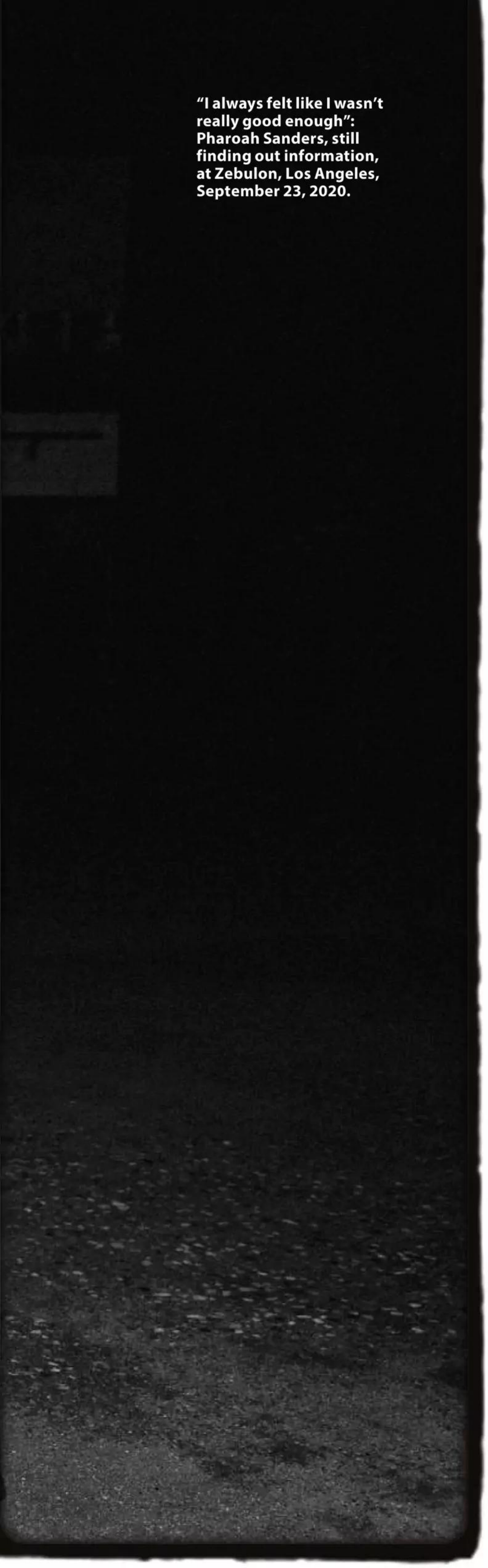
For me myself, I always felt like I wasn't really good enough with what I was doing. So I kept trying to find out information – what I needed to learn. Do I still feel that way? Yeah. Gotta learn. Every time I listen to somebody, they do things that I wish I could do. Everybody's got something different to say. So it kind of messed me around – I started feeling, maybe I should've started playing piano first, instead of sax.

Do you hear your influence in other players? I'm sure Azar here can.

I like the way Azar sounds, I love that kind of sound. I used to ask him why he's around here in LA – I didn't think it was too good to be playing and working here in LA. Because sometimes you have to find your personality, at some point, what you're going to do. When I was in Oakland there were many players, good players – like Smiley Winters, he used to play with Charlie Parker – they told me, "You should go to New York." I didn't know what they meant by "go to New York", I was still trying to study and play music.

You spent some time overseas. Was your international appeal different than it was in the States?

It seemed like people in other countries were far advanced, listening to what they wanted to hear – young, old and all ages. It surprised me, you know? And I'd come back over here and it was very different. Plus, it really helped me because they *paid* me, and that really helped in



"I always felt like I wasn't really good enough": Pharoah Sanders, still finding out information, at Zebulon, Los Angeles, September 23, 2020.

Rachael Wright

my everyday. So I kept wanting to go back over. People like Archie Shepp, a lot of freelance people, they'd go there and were working many, many years before I went over there. I didn't start going over there until maybe in the '70s, late '70s, I don't know. I just didn't know who to hook up with as far as the agencies. I didn't know *anything* about the agencies. Ornette Coleman, I learned a lot from being around him. He'd be telling me, "You can go and they pay you a little bit more money." I didn't understand. I said, "Really, I'm ready if they want to send for me." I didn't have a passport or nothing – so I finally got a passport and I seen what they were talking about. And you know, they paid me pretty well, but at the time I had met Ornette Coleman, he told me, "You should be able to get a whole lot more than this," and so I learned from him. That he wouldn't never go over there unless he got what he wanted to get. So I had to learn to make them respect you, and the price that you say will get you over.

You reappeared on Verve Records in the 1990s in the States, at least briefly. How was that for you?

I didn't actually sign with them. You know, a lot of things I kind of did *wrong*. I started out sort of late. Verve kept calling me, wanting to do something. They mentioned Bill Laswell – he could produce me or whatever that was. But he didn't do it right. They had given him the money that was needed, but he waited a long time, I guess. Apparently they were a little bit angry with him.

PHAROAH'S MASTER PLAN

A jazz giant's spiritual journey, in three albums.
By **John Mulvey**.

THE SOLO BREAKTHROUGH

Pharoah Sanders
Karma
★★★★★
IMPULSE!, 1969

Sanders' third solo album is dominated by The Creator Has A Master Plan, which takes Coltrane's A Love Supreme as its jump-off point and proceeds, over 32 minutes, to become spiritual jazz's ur-text: listen how he moves from soulful measure to freeform rapture (the 16th to 28th minutes are pure fire) with relatively unflappable elegance. Yodelling vocalist/co-writer Leon Thomas's own 1969 version also features Sanders (billed as Little Rock) on tenor and, at 4:23, works as a *de facto* radio edit.

THE BANDLEADER SUPREME

Pharoah Sanders
Black Unity
★★★★★
IMPULSE!, 1971

Sanders' hot streak on Impulse! ran from 1966's *Tauhid* through to 1972's *Wisdom Through Music*: of those nine albums, *Karma* and *Black Unity* are (only just) the picks. This one's a funky 37-minute jam, propelled by the runaway train grooves of a double rhythm section (Cecil McBee and Stanley Clarke on basses, Norman Connors and Billy Hart on drumkits). Less a solo showcase than an exercise in ferocious groupthink; Sanders as generous and empathetic bandleader, just as he was sideman.

THE KARMIC MATCH-UP

Maleem Mahmoud Ghania With Pharoah Sanders
The Trance Of Seven Colors
★★★★
AXIOM, 1994

Sanders' adventures in global traditions have never been quite as expansive as those of fellow musical traveller Don Cherry, but in '94 he and producer Bill Laswell journeyed to Morocco to work with Maleem Mahmoud Ghania and his troupe of Gnawa trance musicians. The match-up proved serendipitous; a summit meeting of devotional musicians finding an ecstatic common ground.

You are considered one of the giants of what is now called "spiritual jazz". What would you say "spiritual jazz" actually *is*?

Well, I always look at music as a kind of very spiritual thing anyway. So I never have to go *to* it. It is all around me.

Has anyone new caught your ear recently? Anybody you're especially impressed with?

Well, you know, a lot of people are doing a lot of things new. I love Azar, the way he plays. A lot of players around me, they play very different – Azar, he likes to express, and he seems to be a very inventive kind of person, and I listen to it and I say, "Yeah, that's great."

Are there any musical areas you haven't explored yet that you'd like to?

Well, it comes and goes, you know. Me, I would like to go to India and study the music over there. Maybe, if possible, play with them. Learn the scales and whatever else I have to learn in order to play. I always like to do more of a cultural exchange, playing with some bands in other countries. I like to listen to them, but I never played with them. I played with [Indian percussionist-composer] Zakir Hussain, I love his playing. I never played with too many sitar players – I'd like to play with them. I always feel like I should get my soprano saxophone out and start playing. My soprano's been in storage about 10 or 12 years. I remember when I couldn't take my soprano on the airplane, they gave me problems and problems. I thought, Well, I'll just leave it at home, and I'll try to make my tenor sound like a soprano.

With the Covid-19 situation, how has life changed for jazz players?

I think we've all been at home, maybe writing more music, maybe practising more, staying healthy. But you can be trying to play some beautiful music, and you still have to go out and make a little money energy or something to help out. Because there don't be too many places you can get food free.

I see you're walking with a cane – how are you holding up physically?

I'm doing OK. In March, I was coming out to work with Joey DeFrancesco, and I fell on my right side and I broke my hip bone. I got up and I thought I was OK, but I tried to walk a few steps and I had to crawl back into the house. I couldn't make it. So ever since, I've gotten a whole lot better, and started healing, and then I got this cane stick, because you might fall again. I can't be doing that.

What do you think is your greatest accomplishment as a musician? What are you proudest of?

I was brought up in a very, very religious way by my mother – I was the first one at church every Sunday – so I've stayed into the church, I'm that kind of person. And I've always loved the music, and I just went in that direction. And when I heard jazz, I loved that, too. It was like another kind of a classical music, a very intelligent way to play music. In some ways you can play music that's maybe *not* so intelligent – and keep digging, keep digging, and then feel something [deeper] that's going to come through. So I decided to *stick* with what's called jazz music – black classical music.

Think you'll ever call it a day playing music?

That's what we got now, unless they're going to pay me enough money to come out of the house. I feel like I *have* retired… (*his raised eyebrows suggest a grin beneath his mask*) … from getting low pay!

Alone with everybody: (clockwise from left) Neil Young performing with CSNY in Uniondale, New York, August 14, 1974; David Crosby, Stephen Stills, Graham Nash and NY backstage in Chicago, August 29, 1974; Young just outside Albuquerque, NM during the Time Fades Away tour, March 3, 1973.

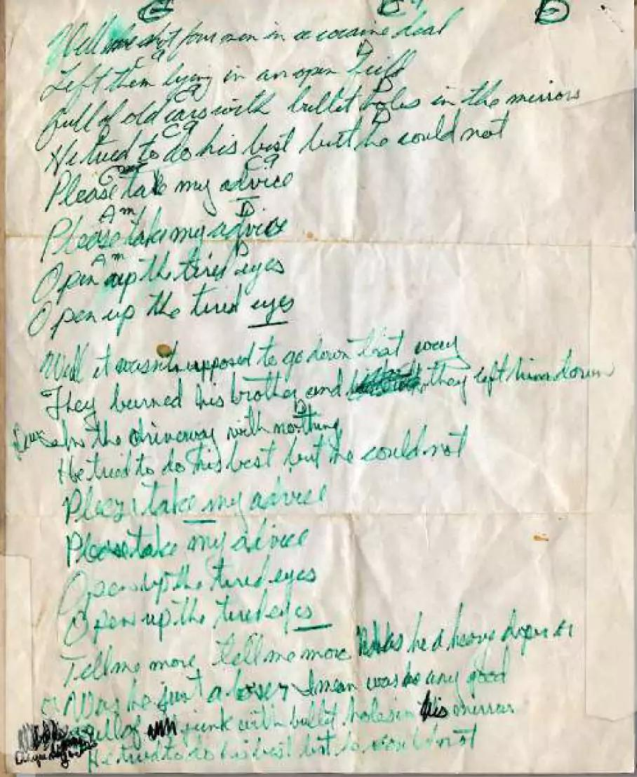
Joel Bernstein (3)

THE BEST OF 2020

DITCH DIGGER

Neil Young's long, long-awaited Archives II box is a 10-disc fantasia of an artist on the edge, an avalanche of stone-cold classics and disinterred gems. Jams with Joni; ceasefires with C, S and N; a wake with The Horse; a whole, unreleased double album: thrilling about-turns that left bandmates with twisted blood or, sometimes, with no gig. As veteran lieutenants Nils Lofgren and Billy Talbot tell David Fricke: "Neil is always ready to go – and not everyone else is ready to go."

Portrait: Joel Bernstein



C D D

Well he shot four men in a cocaine deal

C9 D

Left them lying in an open field

C9 D

Full of old cars with bullet holes in the mirrors

C9 D

He tried to do his best but he could not

C9

Please take my advice

Am D

Please take my advice

Am D

Open up the tired eyes

Open up the tired eyes

Well it wasn't supposed to go down that way

They burned his brother and ~~[illegible]~~ they left him down

D

[illegible] in the driveway with nothing

He tried to do his best but he could not

Please take my advice

Please take my advice

Open up the tired eyes

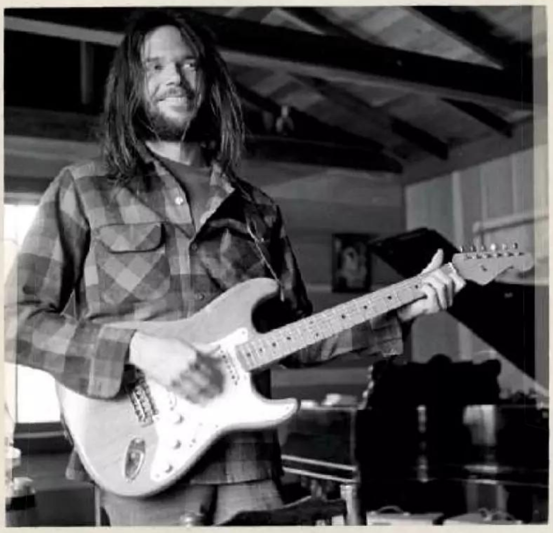
Open up the tired eyes

Tell me more, tell me more [illegible] he a heavy doper or

Was he just a loser I mean was he any good

Full of junk with bullet holes in his mirror

He tried to do his best but he could not



Horses for courses: (clockwise from top) with Ralph Molina, Billy Talbot, Frank 'Poncho' Sampedro, Point Dume, CA, November 1975; the original manuscript for *Tonight's The Night*'s Tired Eyes, 1973; *On The Beach* cover outtake, July 19, 1974; with Nils Lofgren, Tonight's The Night tour, Rainbow, London, November 5, 1973; Young at Broken Arrow ranch, May 29, 1971.

IT WAS THE FIRST DAY OF RECORDING, August 25, 1973. But before a single note was played, Neil Young and his co-producer David Briggs addressed the troops at Studio Instrument Rentals on Santa Monica Boulevard in Hollywood to explain the process for what was to become the most emotionally harrowing and musically unhinged album Young ever made, *Tonight's The Night*.

It was a close-knit corps. Briggs had worked on four of the five studio albums Young made since leaving Buffalo Springfield in 1968, including the 1970 hit, *After The Gold Rush*. Nils Lofgren, a Young-Briggs protégé with his own group, Grin, played guitar and piano on *Gold Rush*, while pedal-steel guitarist Ben Keith, a Nashville session ace, entered Young's orbit on 1972's *Harvest*, draping its Number 1 single Heart Of Gold in authentic bittersweet-country whine. Bassist Billy Talbot and drummer Ralph Molina already knew what was expected of them; they were the engine room in Crazy Horse, the primal-fuzz combo Young launched on his 1969 hippy-garage rock classic, *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*.

Almost 50 years later, Lofgren still vividly remembers that opening lecture. "This was an anti-production record. Neil said, 'Not only are we going to play live in the studio, but I'm not going to let you learn the songs too well. And we're gonna go from one song to the other like a set in a club.'" Briggs added this: "When Neil gets the vocal right, no one can change a note under any circumstances. So stay on it – emotionally down on it."

The setting was a consciously staged production – "an Irish wake," Talbot puts it today, with a generous spread of food, drink and weed for the long breaks dedicated to shooting pool and swapping memories. Nine months before, on November 18, 1972, Crazy Horse guitarist Danny Whitten died at 29 of an overdose after falling out with Young over the former's heroin addiction. Then in June 1973, Bruce Berry – a roadie for the on-off supergroup Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young and a brother of both Jan in Jan And Dean and one of SIR's owners – suffered a fatal overdose at 22. Soon after, Young went to see Briggs. "There was a knock on my door," the producer told Young biographer Jimmy McDonough. "He said, 'I've been doing this record with CSN, and it's all wrong. I want to make a rock'n'roll record.'"

What happened next – the weird regimen at SIR; the brutal mourning and vitality of the performances on *Tonight's The Night* – comes back to life via original album tracks, previously unheard songs and related live recordings in *Archives II: 1972-1976*, the long-awaited second volume in Young's series of chronological box sets. According to many accounts of the sessions, including Young's, he and the band never started cutting these raw, bleak tunes before midnight: the plaintive surrender of Mellow My Mind; the white-line fever in Albuquerque; the literal body count of Tired Eyes.

But Talbot contends that they played everything twice each day – first in the early evening, then in the graveyard hours, after dinner "and a little pot or wine. We'd get a bit inebriated for the evening

> “NEIL’S GOT THIS ENERGY NOW – DIGGING EVERYTHING UP, GETTING IT OUT. HE’S AN OLD GUY NOW – YOU GOTTA GET THESE THINGS TOGETHER.”
> Billy Talbot

session.” Young and the band played his grim title march, a eulogy that mentioned Berry by name, at the front and back of each run-through. “The second time was always the darker side,” the bassist notes. “We’d start with it, full of optimism as we were playing.” By the end, “There was no more optimism. It was the finality, the closing down.”

“The whole thing is about life, dope and death… We played Bruce and Danny on their way all through the night,” Young told Rolling Stone’s Cameron Crowe after the singer – ambivalent about the record’s mission and at times wildly off-key edge – finally released *Tonight’s The Night* in June 1975. “I’m not a junkie,” he added pointedly, “but we all got high enough, right out there on the edge where we felt wide-open to the whole mood. It was spooky. I probably feel this album more than anything else I’ve ever done.”

“It was intimidating in a freeing way,” Lofgren says of that experience. “You’re getting creative with dear friends and everyone is open and honest about the dark chapter we’re in, where everyone is dying.” Young was so charged by the lunacy and cleansing that a week after leaving SIR, he took the band (later dubbed the Santa Monica Flyers after that facility’s address) to Sunset Boulevard for three nights at the Roxy, playing almost nothing but those songs, and a shambolic British tour that polarised audiences unfamiliar with the material, unsettled by the attack. “There was an honesty to it,” Talbot insists but admits those gigs were like riding “in a hearse, driving the body around to different villages.”

It wasn’t all sackcloth and fuzz boxes. Among the 60 rarities, many previously unreleased, over the 10 CDs in *Archives II*, is a surprise from the second night at SIR when Young’s fellow Canadian, Joni Mitchell, dropped by. Primed for mischief, Young and the band accompanied Mitchell on one of her latest songs, Raised On Robbery, an eccentric gallop with a rhythm and chords that baffled Talbot. “She was like a foreign entity,” the bassist concedes. “I was trying to figure out what the hell the changes were.”

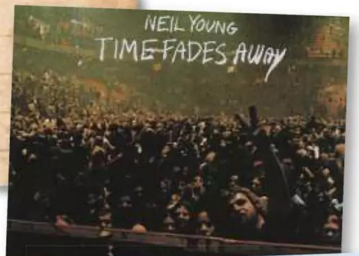
Briggs later claimed that Mitchell “winced” when she heard the tape, “shaking her head over the racket.” But Lofgren says Mitchell was “really happy” that night, “like a kid in a candy store. She kept saying, ‘I’ve never played electric guitar with a band before.’” Four months later, Mitchell released Raised On Robbery as the first single from *Court And Spark*, her plunge into electric jazz-rock. Lofgren couldn’t help noticing that “her keyboard player copped my little riff” from SIR. “I felt happy I did something that stuck with her.”

“IT’LL BE FINISHED THIS SUMMER,” YOUNG declared in May 2014 when I asked him about his progress on *Archives II*. It was five years on from *Archives I: 1963-1972*, a sprawling account in music and films of Young’s origin story (teen dances in Winnipeg, the Toronto folk scene, manic pop life in Buffalo Springfield and CSNY), finally issued in 2009 after years of preparation and a few provisional release dates. Young said the next instalment would go up to *Rust Never Sleeps*, his 1979 landmark with Crazy Horse, and be “full of albums that weren’t there before, stuff I did that I never put out” – including, he swore, the mythical ’70s LPs *Homegrown* and *Chrome Dreams*. There would be five *Archives* boxes in all, he went on, the last dedicated to his work in the 21st century. They would come out “pretty quickly”.

Six years later, Young – who turned 75 in November – is a record industry unto himself, archaeology a speciality. Just since that interview, Young has put out half-a-dozen albums of studio and live treasure from his vault while maintaining a flow of new work. This is an especially crowded season. Along with *Archives II*, Young has released *Return To Greendale*, a 2003 concert of Young performing his eco-themed opera, *Greendale*, with Crazy Horse. There are whispers of a 50th anniversary reissue of *After The Gold Rush*, and *Way Down In The Rust Bucket* – a searing, legendary 1990 club date with Crazy Horse – is slated for 2021.

“He’s got this energy now, digging everything up, getting it out,” says Talbot. “I’m sure he realises he’s an old guy now – you gotta get these things together.” But Young always had “a librarian-esque approach to everything he did,” according to Lofgren, who noticed the singer’s early obsession with legacy – particularly the collection and curating of tapes and artefacts – when he stayed at Young’s Broken Arrow Ranch near San Francisco in the ’70s. “He had a sixth sense about protecting his art,” Lofgren says, “knowing it would serve him well. If you write a song and you’re committed to it, there should never be a time when it may not have some value.”

The economics of reissues and physical product have changed drastically since *Archives I*. ➢



ON THE BEACH

NEIL YOUNG
TONIGHT'S THE NIGHT

© Neil Young, Bob Seidemann, Gijsbert Hanekroot/Alamy, Henry Diltz

EXIT MUSIC

A feast of left-turns, escape routes and *idées fixes*, relished by David Fricke.

NEIL YOUNG

★★★★

Archives II: 1972-1976

Reprise CD

THERE IS method in the madness if not the waiting. Eleven years after *Archives I* concluded with War Song, Neil Young's 1972 protest single with Graham Nash, the second broadside in Young's serial-box set project begins back at the front lines: Letter From 'Nam, a solo demo taped that same year, never delivered on a studio LP. But another song caught that day, the broken-love ballad The Bridge, was strong enough to hit the road, becoming a deep breath in the open-bar havoc of Young's 1973 live album, *Time Fades Away*.

And so it goes for 10 hours and change, Young pulling at the connective threads between his official works and established triumphs, exploratory sessions and last-minute caprice, as he writes the definitive account of his life in records, performance and truly iron will. As these are the Years of Refusal – the trenchant reaction to crowd-pleasing after *Harvest*; the arm's-length politics with CSNY – the running theme is escape and its consequences, often in songs that cycle around more than once (Mellow My Mind; Traces; three stabs at Love/Art Blues) as Young tests their mettle and his grip on the telling. He even revisits the *Archives I* orphan Bad Fog Of Loneliness with the *Tonight's The Night* version of Crazy Horse, proving that Young rarely gives up on a tune for good.

Young's reliance on the Horse – that sturdy, bruising force, renewed in late '74 when guitarist Frank Sampedro joined – is writ large and loud in this wandering, climaxing at the end of the set with the fuzz and flames of Drive Back and Cortez The Killer live at the Budokan in Tokyo. But in the 1975 sessions for *Zuma*, they are already banging on Ride My Llama, Powderfinger and Pocahontas – a third of 1979's *Rust Never Sleeps*.

That is a story hopefully to be told at length on *Archives III*. But at the rate we're going, don't hold your breath.

"Songs cycle around more than once as Young tests their mettle and his grip on the telling."

NEIL YOUNG ARCHIVES VOL. II
NEIL YOUNG ARCHIVES VOL. II
NEIL

≺ Housed in an oblong box that stood on one end like an ancient monolith, it came in three different formats – CD, DVD and a new home-entertainment technology, Blu-ray. *Archives II* is only on CD and was initially limited to 3,000 copies worldwide. (After that run sold out in 48 hours, in pre-orders on Young's website, he announced that another edition was coming.)

Archives II is slimmer in scope than Young promised in 2014, covering less than four years from November 1972 (three newly-unearthed tracks from a solo, acoustic session) to Young's first, blazing international tour with Crazy Horse and their new guitarist, Frank 'Poncho' Sampedro, in March 1976. But the narrative is deeper and richer for it, concentrating on Young's artistic life in sudden U-turns and hellbent noise – what he fondly coined "the ditch" – as he veered away from the mainstream expectations aroused by *Gold Rush* and *Harvest*, starting with his 1973 tour with the Stray Gators. A rolling bacchanal barely contained on that year's *Times Fades Away*, it is presented in rowdy, alternate form – rehearsals; an unexpected stomp through The Loner in Oklahoma City; the Alabama gig issued last year as *Tuscaloosa* – on *Archives II*.

"It's centrally the work of a man who had a shrewd suspicion that the Business was doing him in and only just found out how," Ian MacDonald wrote in NME of the frayed nerves and caustic balladry on Young's 1974 album, *On The Beach*. "I just didn't feel like I was a lonely figure with a guitar or whatever the trip is that people see me as," Young said in 1975, addressing the purgative temper of *Tonight's The Night*. "I thought I'd just forget about all that… wipe it out."

It was not a clean sweep. *Archives II* has two spare, gorgeous versions of Young's Human Highway, done four years apart, by the otherwise fractious CSNY. One disc, subtitled *The Old Homestead*, is a missing double LP in itself: 19 songs – mostly unreleased, many never revisited by Young – from the year that produced *Homegrown*, a record he once called "the darker side of *Harvest*" for its contradiction of country comforts and the deep wounds from the finish of his relationship with actress Carrie Snodgress. (Finally released in June, 45 years after Young suddenly pulled it at the last minute in favour of unleashing *Tonight's The Night, Homegrown* is also Disc 7 in *Archives II*.)

"He says in our '75 interview, 'I feel free,'" Cameron Crowe tells MOJO today. "He had the pressure of huge success; he had CSNY. Then he and Carrie break up, and he's in Malibu, making this sonic explosion with Crazy Horse" – AKA the 1975 fireball, *Zuma*, much of it recorded live in a house Young rented in Point Dume. "Take Neil at his word," says Crowe, who attended one of those sessions. "He really is free, flying through these different impulses."

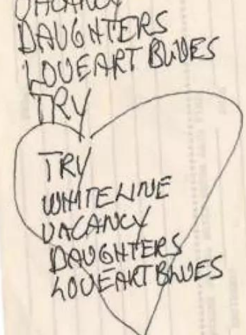
AMID THE WHIPLASH, YOUNG KEPT FALLING BACK on two bedrock partnerships – with Briggs and Crazy Horse – that would run long past the '70s. A volatile, outspoken counsellor and guardian, Briggs was Young's first line of defence in the studio when managers and record-label suits tried to bend the artist's ear about commercial potential or another CSNY tour. "David would tell these people, 'Not now' – curtly but politely," Lofgren recalls. "And when they kept talking to Neil, ignoring David, he would chase them out of the room: 'Get the fuck out of our session. You can talk to him when we're not making music.' Of course, Neil loved that. He didn't want to start cursing out record executives, even though he appreciated the peace and focus David would demand."

And it was in the ditch – after Whitten's death, starting with the gritty, mutual grieving of *Tonight's The Night* – that Young cemented his bond with Talbot and Molina, the unshakeable heartbeat of Crazy Horse. Bandmates in LA since the early '60s, they played doo wop with Whitten as Danny And The Memories and evolved with psychedelia into The Rockets until Young poached all three to be his electric warriors on *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*. By 1975 and *Zuma*, with the addition of Sampedro's brawny, stoic rhythm guitar, Talbot and Molina's avenging simplicity and unquestioning loyalty were indivisible from Young's periodic outbursts of garage rock idealism, peaking in *Archives II* with the legendary '76 mayhem in Tokyo and London's Hammersmith Odeon. To this day – with Lofgren back on guitar, replacing the retired Sampedro – Young knows who to call when it's time to get primitive, mad and loud.

"'Hey Billy, it's Neil, I've got this idea' – that's how it would start," Talbot says, laughing. "Then he probably called Ralph – or said, 'Tell Ralph', who lived next door to me at the time. There was a constant connection," even if years went by between albums or tours. "We always knew he was there. He knew we were here."

A studio date typically began with Young "playing a song on Old Black," the bassist says, referring to the leader's trusty 1953 Gibson Les Paul. "He went after it, and we followed as best we could. He'd want to catch things right away, after one or two takes."

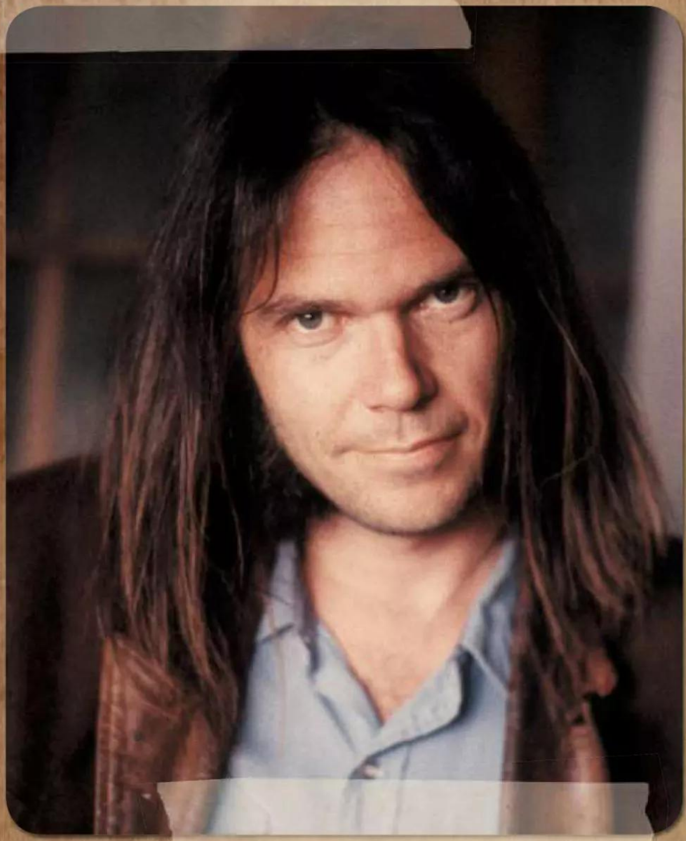
The epic Like A Hurricane, recorded at Broken Arrow in November 1975, was "not that complicated. But we'd never played it before. We were lucky to have caught those choruses good." The enduring tenderness of the January 1976 Look Out For My Love, again from Broken Arrow, was cut "before we knew it too well, before it got tired and there wasn't as much soul in it." (Both can be heard early on Disc 9 of *Archives II*.)



WHITE LINE
VACANCY
DAUGHTERS
LOVEART BLUES
TRY
TRY
WHITELINE
VACANCY
DAUGHTERS
LOVEART BLUES

Finished! Err, work-in-progress running order for *Homegrown*, 1974.

Neil Young Archives, Joel Bernstein (2), Henry Diltz



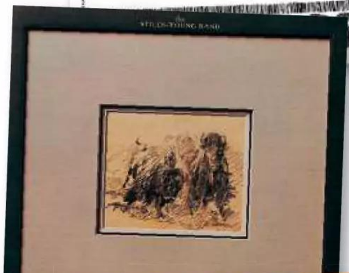
Frenemy lines: (clockwise, from above) Stills, Young, Crosby and Nash in Lahaina, Maui, 1973; recording Raised On Robbery with Joni Mitchell at SIR, August 26, 1973; at home in Trancas, CA, June 1975.

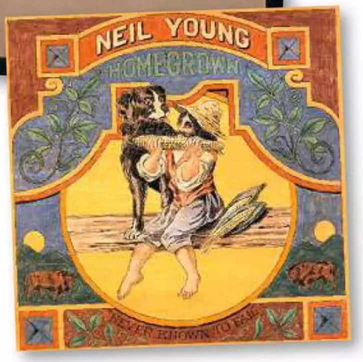
> **"JONI WAS LIKE A KID IN A CANDY STORE. SHE KEPT SAYING, 'I'VE NEVER PLAYED ELECTRIC GUITAR WITH A BAND BEFORE.'"**
>
> Nils Lofgren

Yet two weeks later, Young abandoned Crazy Horse for one of his most perplexing episodes in the ditch: *Long May You Run*, the uneven result of a ill-fated collaboration with close friend and recurring adversary Stephen Stills. Their shared history in Buffalo Springfield, as lead guitarists and that band's most accomplished writers, boded well. The respective state of their solo careers did not; Young, in 1976, was the much bigger draw. There were complications with the rest of CSNY (who had their vocals on the album removed) and tensions escalated between the principals during the belaboured sessions: Young took a break in the middle for the Japanese and European dates with Crazy Horse.

He quit the Stills-Young Band for good in July 1976 – three months before *Long May You Run* came out and halfway through a sold-out arena tour, abruptly informing Stills by telegram and notoriously concluding it with the instruction, "Eat a peach." It is no surprise that Young largely skates through that debacle on *Archives II*. The grasping at straws is best illustrated by a previously unreleased Stills-Young version of Traces, a Young tune salvaged from his solo spots on CSNY's 1974 stadium tour. "Neil says in all of our interviews that Stephen is his brother, a magical force," says Crowe, who covered the episode for Rolling Stone. "But I don't think it was feeling great to Neil." And when that happens, "he summons the muse – and listens to it." And so by the autumn of 1976, Young was touring America again – but this time with Crazy Horse.

NEIL YOUNG
ZUMA.





In Jimmy McDonough's biography Shakey, Young explained it thus: "You gotta be able to say, 'Well, that's the end of that for awhile. I'm gonna do something else.' And know when to do it. It wasn't fun firing guys in my band in high school, but I still had to do it – so the band would be better, so that we keep going." As his longtime manager Elliot Roberts, who died in 2019, observed, Young "never thought he was fucking you. He thought he had warned you, if not in reality, in actions before it."

"He moves so fast, always ready to go – and not everyone else is always ready to go," Lofgren says of Young, effectively summing up *Archives II*'s extended season of chaos.

"It's funny," the guitarist goes on, "because I tour England almost every year – I used to 'til the pandemic – and without fail, after every show when I go out to sign stuff, somebody comes up and says, 'You know that Tonight's The Night tour? I'm sorry for yelling at you, yelling for the hits. Because looking back, that was one of the most special nights of music I ever had. My apologies for not getting it.'"

MOJO'S

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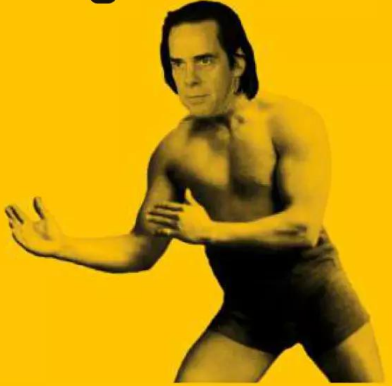
ON THE CANVAS...

BOB "ROUGH & ROWDY" DYLAN!



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NICK "CAVEMAN" CAVE!

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MOSES SUMNEY'S IRRESISTIBLE RISE · MARK "THE GARGOYLE" LANEGAN: HE LIVES!

Travis Keller, Alamy (2), Getty

75 ROLLING BLACKOUTS COASTAL FEVER
Sideways To New Italy
(SUB POP)

74 US GIRLS
Heavy Light (4AD)

73 JASON ISBELL & THE 400 UNIT
Reunions (SOUTHEASTERN)

72 WIRE
10:20 (PINKFLAG)

71 FIELD MUSIC
Making A New World
(MEMPHIS INDUSTRIES)

70 ANGEL OLSEN
Whole New Mess
(JAGJAGUWAR)

69 THE PSYCHEDELIC FURS
Made Of Rain (COOKING VINYL)

68 THE HOMESICK
The Big Exercise (SUB POP)

67 JEFF PARKER
Suite For Max Brown
(INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM)

66 BONNY LIGHT HORSEMAN
Bonny Light Horseman (37D03D)

65 BECK
Hyperspace (CAPITOL)

64 THE LEMON TWIGS
Songs For The General Public
(4AD)

63 CAR SEAT HEADREST
Making A Door Less Open
(MATADOR)

62 REN HARVIEU
Revel In The Drama
(BELLA UNION)

61 CHRIS FORSYTH WITH GARCIA PEOPLES
Peoples Motel Band
(ALGORITHM FREE)

60 DOVES
The Universal Want
(HEAVENLY)

59 BAXTER DURY
The Night Chancers
(HEAVENLY)

58 WORKING MEN'S CLUB
Working Men's Club
(HEAVENLY)

57 SONGHOY BLUES
Optimisme (TRANSGRESSIVE)

56 THE MAGNETIC FIELDS
Quickies (NONESUCH)

55 TIM BURGESS
I Love The New Sky
(BELLA UNION)

54 THE WATERBOYS
Good Luck, Seeker
(COOKING VINYL)

53 NADINE SHAH
Kitchen Sink (INFECTIOUS)

52 SAULT
Untitled (Rise)
(FOREVER LIVING ORIGINALS)

51 DON BRYANT
You Make Me Feel
(FAT POSSUM)

50

SUFJAN STEVENS
THE ASCENSION

SUFJAN STEVENS

The Ascension
ASTHMATIC KITTY

If 2015's *Carrie & Lowell* privileged Stevens' gift for confessional folk-pop, its belated follow-up showcased his vast conceptual ambitions, the yang to *C&L*'s intimate yin. *The Ascension* folded faith, socio-political commentary and a panoply of personal anxieties into dense, expansive, glitch-riddled synth-pop, Stevens finding tantalising traces of hope in a world on fire from the security of his new farm in upstate New York.

Standout track: *America*

49

LIANNE LA HAVAS

Lianne La Havas
WARNER

The five years between La Havas's second and third albums evidently saw the London singer-songwriter undertaking a radical rethink of her music: *Lianne La Havas* still had its roots in a kind of UK response to nu-soul, but it manifested in ways that were alternately jazzier, folkier and, most rewarding of all, freakier. A frisson of guitar rock came to the fore, too – never more so than on a superb rethink of Radiohead's Weird Fishes.

Standout track: *Weird Fishes*

48

NADIA REID

Out Of My Province
SPACEBOMB

In the wake of her second album in 2017, New Zealander Reid told MOJO she planned to "bring it all back to just guitars and voices". *Out Of My Province*, however, turned out somewhat differently: tales of disorientation and dislocation on the road from country to country, given a cosmopolitan folk-soul richness – with horns and strings pillowing Reid's calm voice and guitar – courtesy of Matthew E White's Spacebomb crew.

Standout track: *Best Thing*

47

TRICKY

Fall To Pieces
FALSE IDOLS

Always one to avoid the spotlight when possible, Tricky was more elusive than ever on his 14th album, ceding most leads to his latest foil, Polish vocalist Marta Złakowska. His presence – a sinister mutter here, brooding anguish there – shadowed these minimalist beat workouts and grunge études, occasionally rearing into focus on tracks like Hate The Pain; a necessarily harrowing expression of grief following the death of his daughter in May 2019.

Standout track: *Like A Stone*

46

LIVE AT THE ROUNDHOUSE
NICK MASON'S
SAUCERFUL OF SECRETS

NICK MASON'S SAUCERFUL OF SECRETS

Live At The Roundhouse
LEGACY

The irrepressible Mason's career seemed to be focusing more on vintage cars than drums until he became guardian of the Floyd's psychedelic heritage. This live LP from summer 2019 captured the virtuosity and glee of his Saucerful combo, laying into the pre-*Dark Side* songbook with gusto. A Sex Pistols allusion in The Nile Song pointed up the project's disdain for historical facsimile.

Standout track: *Obscured By Clouds*

45

Bruce Springsteen
LETTER TO YOU

BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

Letter To You
COLUMBIA

Not just a reunion with the E Street Band, Springsteen's 20th LP presented the band as most of their fans – and, indeed, Stevie Van Zandt – wanted to hear them: live in the studio, unfiltered, for the first time in 35 years. It was a perfect accompaniment for The Boss's musing on key musical memories (three abandoned early '70s songs) and lasting camaraderie: rock's premium mythographer at his most self-referential and emotionally direct.

Standout track: *If I Was The Priest*

44

PEARL JAM

Gigaton
MONKEYWRENCH

Dance Of The Clairvoyants, the first single from their 11th album, might have signalled an extreme style change – Pearl Jam as Talking Heads-indebted dance-rockers, no less – but its experimentation was reflected in *Gigaton*'s open-mindedness more than its overall sound. PJ's longest LP found their morally-engaged stadium rock gently expanded upon, and invested with even more urgency: a mature call to action as the ice-caps melt.

Standout track: *Retrograde*

43

Blake Mills
mutable set

BLAKE MILLS

Mutable Set
NEW DEAL

The LA multi-tasker was as busy as ever in 2020: duties included guitar licks on Dylan's album and producing Perfume Genius. There was also time, though, for a terrific fourth solo album, showing that Mills' understated creativity could aid his own cause – an Elliott Smith-like songwriting delicacy – as well as other people's. Cass McCombs contributed lyrics, Pino Palladino bass; Mills himself, meanwhile, exercised phenomenal restraint on guitar.

Standout track: *Vanishing Twin*

42

BILL FAY

Countless Branches
DEAD OCEANS

The London singer-songwriter's return to action since 2012, after a 40-year hiatus, has been one of the most rewarding comebacks of this century. His third album of the decade stripped away much of the chamber pop ornamentation of its predecessors, giving even greater weight to the tender hesitancies of his voice and piano. A beatific sense of wonder, and a calm acceptance of mortality prevailed, more movingly than ever.

Standout track: *Love Will Remain*

41

TAME IMPALA
THE SLOW RUSH

TAME IMPALA

The Slow Rush
MODULAR

The fourth Tame Impala album found Kevin Parker drifting further away from the guitar fireworks that made his name. But even as he leaned harder on digitalia and disco beats, Parker's woozy aesthetic stayed intact: a 21st century psych that understood French filtered house was just as mind-expanding as vintage jams. Poignant, too, as the featherlight melancholy crystallised, on Posthumous Forgiveness, into a eulogy for his late father.

Standout track: *Tomorrow's Dust*

AMERICANA

Compiled by SYLVIE SIMMONS

1 **LUCINDA WILLIAMS** Good Souls Better Angels (THIRTY TIGERS)
2 **BILL CALLAHAN** Gold Record (DRAG CITY)
3 **DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS** The Unraveling (ATO)
4 **STEVE EARLE** Ghosts Of West Virginia (NEW WEST)
5 **ALLISON MOORER** Blood (AUTOTELIC/THIRTY TIGERS)
6 **RAY WYLIE HUBBARD** Bad Trick (BIG MACHINE)
7 **LAURA VEIRS** My Echo (BELLA UNION)
8 **EARLY JAMES** Singing For My Supper (NONESUCH)
9 **THE LOST BROTHERS** After The Fire After The Rain (BIRD DOG)
10 **ZEPHANIAH OHORA** Listening To The Music (LAST ROUNDUP)

UNDERGROUND

Compiled by ANDREW MALE

1 **TATSUHISA YAMAMOTO** Ashioto (BLACK TRUFFLE)
2 **SARAH DAVACHI** Cantus, Descant (LATE MUSIC)
3 **DELPHINE DORA** L'Inattingible (THREE;FOUR)
4 **TASHI DORJI** Stateless (DRAG CITY)
5 **FUJI||||||||||TA** Iki (HALLOW GROUND)
6 **OLIVER COATES** Skins N Slime (RVNG INTL)
7 **CLAIRE ROUSAY** It Was Always Worth It (LONGFORM EDITIONS)
8 **LUCRECIA DALT** No Era Sólida (RVNG INTL)
9 **RICHARD SKELTON** These Charms May Be Sung Over A Wound (PHANTOM LIMB)
10 **BRONIUS KUTAVIČIUS** Last Pagan Rites/From The Yotvingian Stone (MUSIC INFORMATION CENTRE LITHUANIA)

40

THURSTON MOORE
BY THE FIRE

THURSTON MOORE

By The Fire
DAYDREAM LIBRARY SERIES

The inexhaustible Moore has hardly been dormant since Sonic Youth split in 2011, toggling as usual from far-flung avant exploits to more accessible rapprochements, but *By The Fire* felt like his most coherent and satisfying statement of that busy decade. A tight band helped, with My Bloody Valentine's Deb Googe resolute on bass, and a shared questing imperative: to rethink rock music, without losing any of its dynamic impact or heft. **Standout track:** *Siren*

39

HAIM

Women In Music Pt. III
COLUMBIA

The three Haim sisters' brilliantly accomplished updating of LA soft-rock mores sometimes felt a little too arch for its own good, but their third album added more emotional grist to the artful songcraft, Fleetwood Mac-meets-contemporary R&B chops and good gags; check the droll title. More range, too, as Joni Mitchell homages (Man From The Magazine) and glitterbeat (Up From A Dream) were thrown into the mix, with pinpoint accuracy. **Standout track:** *The Steps*

38

LUCINDA WILLIAMS
GOOD SOULS BETTER ANGELS

LUCINDA WILLIAMS

Good Souls Better Angels
THIRTY TIGERS

Having spent the past few years re-examining career landmarks, both live and in the studio, Williams returned to new songs with a fresh writing partner in husband/co-producer Tom Overby, and a rough and rowdy take on garage blues. Old myths resurfaced – John The Revelator appeared – but the fury and apocalyptic vibes were from a very modern evil: Trump, etched in Man Without A Soul. **Standout track:** *Big Rotator*

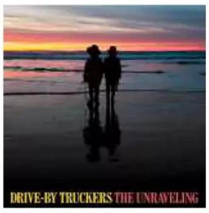
37

DUA LIPA

Future Nostalgia
WARNER

1980s flashbacks have been a constant in pop for so long now – decades, it seems – but the British-Kosovan star's second album was still notable: a high water mark of 21st century chart music, openly flaunting a retro disco chic. The presence of Stuart Price among the producer battalions was significant: *Future Nostalgia* was precision-tooled for fans of his most famous client, Madonna. Neat INXS homage in Break My Heart, too. **Standout track:** *Hallucinate*

36



DRIVE-BY TRUCKERS

The Unraveling
ATO

Patterson Hood, Mike Cooley and their bandmates spent most of the past four years trying to find a direction other than one set by political rage – and, perhaps fortunately, failed. *The Unraveling* was the first of two Truckers LPs in 2020, potent heartland rock – a little Bruce, a little Petty, a little R.E.M. – made in Memphis. The lyrics were stark, unflinching, furious: righteous protest music for this benighted year. **Standout track:** *Babies In Cages*

35

ROSE CITY BAND
SUMMERLONG

ROSE CITY BAND

Summerlong
THRILL JOCKEY

Not content with helming two exceptional psych outfits in Wooden Shjips and Moon Duo, Ripley Johnson started a third – a mostly solo project confusingly named the Rose City Band. *Summerlong*, their second album, was Johnson's take on country rock, a good-times grab-bag of motorik twangers and cosmic chooggles, occupying an elevated – and seldom visited – zone between Spacemen 3 and the Grateful Dead. **Standout track:** *Real Long Gone*

34

MARIA MCKEE
LA VITA NUOVA

MARIA MCKEE

La Vita Nuova
FIRE

McKee's past as lead singer of cowpunks Lone Justice, and voice behind Number 1 belter Show Me Heaven, gave scant notice for this latest extraordinary comeback. *La Vita Nuova*, her first in 13 years, found her in London referencing Dickens and Dante, as she reintroduced herself as a "pansexual, poly-amorous, gender fluid dyke" garbed in lavish, baroque chamber pop: think Rufus Wainwright, earlyish Bowie, a phantasmagorical idea of Joni on Broadway. **Standout track:** *La Vita Nuova*

33

THE NECKS

Three
RER/NORTHERN SPY

"We've only been going 33 years and already we're getting famous," Australian trio The Necks told MOJO in January. Now, album 21 was a perfect entry point to their compelling soundworld: longform improvisations that nodded to jazz, ambience, classical composition, even post-rock, without conforming to expectations of any single genre. Creating alchemy out of piano, bass and drums, *Three* reaffirmed their status as one of the world's great cult groups. **Standout track:** *Further*

32

CORIKY

Coriky
DISCHORD

Fugazi's "indefinite hiatus" has lasted some 18 years now, but the first album by Coriky hearteningly reunited half – Ian MacKaye and bassist Joe Lally – of the DC hardcore legends. The trio's third member, Amy Farina, previously accompanied MacKaye in the less visceral Evens, but while that duo's indie playfulness remained, Coriky also channelled Fugazi's attack, dynamic lurch and reggae reverberations; note the Bob Marley quote in BQM. **Standout track:** *Clean Kill*

31

TAYLOR SWIFT

Folklore
REPUBLIC

Lockdown encouraged a certain intimate, reflective spirit in artists able to work from home – none more so than the clever and practical Swift. If her roots were in mainstream country, this eighth album artfully repositioned her as an adjunct of the indie-folk world, pensées discreetly buffeted by the remote production skills of The National's ubiquitous multi-tasker, Aaron Dessner. Bon Iver guested, with requisite sensitivity and gravitas, on an entirely successful detour from pop. **Standout track:** *Seven*

Ringing true: Cornershop's Tjinder Singh (left) and Ben Ayres take a break from the gardening.

Marie Remy

COME BACK OF THE YEAR

"WE SEE IT AS A COMEBACK OF OUR WHOLE CAREER."

How CORNERSHOP, Tjinder Singh and Ben Ayres' record-collecting boogie machine, made more sense than ever in 2020. By VICTORIA SEGAL.

ARRIVING IN 2020's desolate landscape with superhero timing, *England Is A Garden* was Tjinder Singh and Ben Ayres' first non-collaborative album since 2009's *Judy Sucks A Lemon For Breakfast*. Brimful of human warmth in a world suddenly starved of face-to-face connection, it stirred up a joyous tonic of Midlands rock'n'roll, Northern soul, birdsong and Bolan boogie, while reflecting grimly enduring – yet acute – issues of empire, police brutality, racism and survival. For Singh, their return synthesises 27 years of politics and pop hits, a continuing musical arc: "It's all come together," he says. "It's not a concept album – it's our concept of albums."

England Is A Garden is Top 10 in MOJO's Albums Of The Year.

Tjinder Singh: "Obviously Top 10 is tip-top."

Ben Ayres: "It's really amazing because when we set about trying to finish this record, it was really difficult. We'd spent about 10 years recording tracks and we had to whittle them down to force ourselves to finish them. We went into the finishing of it thinking we'd been pretty much forgotten, so we felt quite free to do whatever we wanted. We didn't know if anyone would be interested at all, let alone like it."

Does it feel like a comeback?

TS: "We see it as a comeback of our whole career – that the album has shone backward to what we've done with previous albums. It's put them in alignment and made them more understandable. *When I Was Born For The 7th Time* got so much attention that it's difficult to get away from that sometimes. It was a very good album but *Handcream For A Generation* was better, and I personally think that *Judy…* was even better than that. I wasn't in a great way for quite a long time – still aren't really – so that made things slower, but we waited because we knew we had to get it right."

Did the events of 2020 shift your view of the album?

TS: "It's certainly helped a lot of people through isolation. And this one – in particular with Everywhere That Wog Army Roam, and police brutality and Black Lives Matter – rang true with what's going on. There's a lot of elements of Brexit peppered in the songs. So I think this record is a moving target. It's a living album."

BA: "We've never shied away from being political but we've always wanted to make it sound upbeat at the same time. We're both huge fans of Curtis Mayfield so there's an element of taking his lead."

TS: "If it isn't upbeat you aren't going to get through to people. And once they're through then you can hit them with harder stuff. We try not to put lyrics on there; we want people to look for it themselves. And some people do and some people are happy just riding on a melody, and as record collectors we are more than happy about that."

Did lockdown thwart your record collecting?

TS: "I was so up to my knees in it with records, it's been nice to finally have enough space and a clear head to go through stuff. I probably don't dart to the record section of the charity shop but to crockery nowadays. German stuff is always of a good quality. My wife does clothes as well. I think that's what helped us keep some semblance of sanity, having something else to do [during] this madness. I'm not great at gardening but we are doing our own salad. That's lovely, to go round cutting your own salad every day. That certainly is a garden in England."

> "THIS RECORD IS A *MOVING* TARGET. IT'S A LIVING ALBUM." – TJINDER SINGH

THE 20 BEST REISSUES OF 2020

20

NEW ORDER

Power Corruption And Lies (Definitive Edition)

RHINO

Beautifully enhanced 37 years on, one of New Order's most shining moments added how-it's-made demos, live DVDs and a TV doc which illuminated the madness behind the lines with dry Manc wit.

19

JUJU
AFRICAN RHYTHMS

ONENESS OF JUJU

African Rhythms 1970-1982

STRUT

Two-disc comp of James 'Plunky' Blanch's groove team, whose politically conscious, Afro-jazz-funk hybrid blended politics with irresistible calls to dance and sheer rhythmic power.

18

VARIOUS

The Harry Smith B-Sides

DUST TO DIGITAL

Smith's garlanded 1952 *Anthology Of American Folk Music* flipped, literally, presenting the B-sides to each of the original 78s recorded between 1926 and 1933. The blues, country and gospel backstory to the folk revival.

17

SHARHABIL AHMED

The King Of Sudanese Jazz

HABIBI FUNK

A joyfully swinging, soulful set by Ahmed, whose late-'60s and early-'70s take on jazz was underpinned by a Bo Diddley clatter – like Dexys covering Mulatu Astatke.

15

NENEH CHERRY

NENEH CHERRY

Raw Like Sushi 30th Anniversary Edition

VIRGIN

Famously pregnant on TOTP for '88 hit Buffalo Stance, this solo debut kept that nonchalance to talk relationships, parenthood and the city in pop hip-hop grooves. With remixes galore.

14

Karen Dalton

KAREN DALTON

Recording Is The Trip: The Karen Dalton Archives

MEGAPHONE

On 3CDs, the enigmatic folk singer's earliest recordings in Boulder, Colorado coffee houses, 1962/63. Light is shed on an artist who failed to record before the folk scene imploded.

13

the stooges

THE STOOGES

Live At Goose Lake: August 8th, 1970

THIRD MAN

Historic discovery: the original Stooges' last stand, after which bassist Dave Alexander was fired for snorting ketamine backstage. The tapes find the band rallying with ferocity.

12

ROBERTA FLACK

First Take: 50th Anniversary Deluxe Edition

ATLANTIC

Flack's 1969 debut, The First Time Ever… and all, exhibited her ease on gospel, Broadway, soul-jazz, Cohen – in studied arrangements. Plus 1968 demos, on-stage cuts and covers.

11

LOU REED

New York (Deluxe Edition)

RHINO

Reed's '89 anatomising of *his* dirty old town made the city's '70s seem welcoming, as lost souls endured crack, AIDS and social collapse. Live and studio bonuses underscored the cold, continuing relevance.

10

POLE

Pole 1 2 3

MUTE

Stefan Betke, Berlin inventor of twitching, glistening electronic minimalism that would influence Radiohead's *Kid A* and other heads, reissued his original trilogy of LPs in a box set of glitching techno beats and dub grooves.

8

Joni Mitchell

JONI MITCHELL

Joni Mitchell Archives Volume 1

RHINO

Mitchell's long-awaited archival dig began with 1963-67. Radio and TV, live sets and home tapes tracked a rapid evolution from singing Mollie Malone in Saskatoon to penning Little Green, played live in Toronto.

7

IGGY POP

The Bowie Years

UMC

Remarkable to think *The Idiot* (synthetic, nervy) and rocking *Lust For Life* came from the same '76/77 upsurge, as two burned out cases found each other's energy to feed off in Berlin. Live shows and outtakes sweetened the pot.

6

Grateful Dead
WORKINGMAN'S DEAD

GRATEFUL DEAD

Workingman's Dead: 50th Anniversary Deluxe Edition

RHINO

Quitting 'Frisco for Marin County at the '60s end, the Dead found harmony and concise songs, a West Coast take on The Band's rootsy vision. Plus 1971 live set.

5

THE GO-BETWEENS

G Stands For Go-Betweens

DOMINO

Anthology's *Volume 2* with three late-'80s LPs expanded to 129 tracks, full of romance and bad luck viewed with wit and insight. Adds demos for uncompleted *Freakchild* LP and 100-page book.

4

PJ HARVEY

Dry

ISLAND

A year of Polly Harvey reissues began in July with the bruised beauty of her 1992 debut. The same month saw a separate album of demos that revealed the songs' core brutality, even in this fragile, 4-track form.

3

RICHARD & LINDA THOMPSON

Hard Luck Stories (1972-1982)

UMC

Folk rock's first couple's musical life in 8-CD box. CD2 found fresh paths in '75's *I Want To See The Bright Lights Tonight*; 31 previously unreleased tracks illuminated everything thereafter.

16

TUBBY HAYES

The Complete Fontana Albums

DECCA

This 11-LP or 13-CD set of Hayes' '60s albums for Fontana reaffirmed the tenor sax, vibes and flute improviser's place in the pantheon of British jazz greats. Scrupulous restoration includes the unreleased *Grits, Beans And Greens*.

9

THE ROLLING STONES

Goats Head Soup: Deluxe Edition

UNIVERSAL

On their 'Jamaican' LP, the Stones dialled it down with fine ballads (Angie; Coming Down Again) and Mick Taylor still in the groove (100 Years Ago). With 2020 extras and 1973 live set.

2

NEIL YOUNG

Homegrown

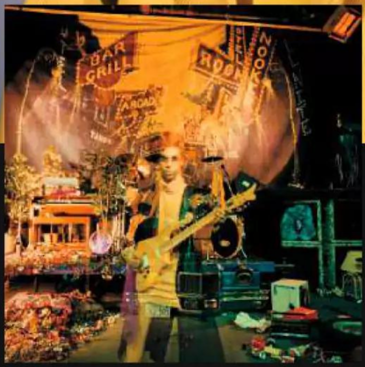
REPRISE

Ending 45 years of speculation, Young's 1975 album saw the light. Recorded in a post-break-up dark phase, the songs connected *Harvest* to *Comes A Time* with melancholy country (Vacancy) and stoned rumination (Florida).

Jeff Katz

"Fresh tape!" Prince gets ready to keep us up another 24 hours.

"IT'S AN *INSIGHT* TO WHAT PRINCE KEPT HIDDEN"



1 PRINCE

SIGN 'O' THE TIMES

RHINO

An isolation masterpiece from 1987, radically expanded for 2020. Engineer Susan Rogers explains their strange relationship to MARTIN ASTON.

REISSUE OF THE YEAR

INSIDE MOST double albums is a better single album. Yet as this year's monumentally expanded box set proved, Prince's 1987 magnum opus *Sign 'O' The Times* could have been a triple, or even more, such was the strength of the 40 unearthed cuts inside the Super-Deluxe Edition. "Prince was what neuro-scientists call 'hyper creative'," reckons *SOTT* studio engineer Susan Rogers, his only constant companion throughout the marathon sessions. "They're born, not made. That's why he had to keep working.

"I couldn't be more thrilled, and gratified, that the world is recognising more of Prince than we could during his lifetime," continues Rogers. "He earned it, too. His record label says that *Sign 'O' The Times*' 94 pieces of music represent more recorded work than Michael Jackson in the '80s and Hendrix in his lifetime. You'd think 94 tracks in one year would contain some dreck, but there really isn't any. Prince had an extraordinarily rare creative mind, but also self-discipline, the multi-instrumental skills and the ability to work in isolation.

"During *Sign 'O' The Times*, the absurdity and excitement always made me laugh. No matter how exhausted he was, we could have been up all night and getting ready for bed and he'd walk in and say, 'Fresh tape!' Which meant possibly another 24 hours. I love the more soulful stuff of the unreleased tracks, especially Train. If you don't know it, be ready for Prince's vocal; you'll have to grab on to something! I love that we can compare multiple versions of the same song. The original of Forever In My Life, he sounds so happy, like it's his wedding day. But the version on the album is more sombre and dissonant, like he's aware that marriage takes work. It's an insight to what Prince was willing to let the public know and what he kept hidden."

"YOU'D THINK 94 TRACKS IN ONE YEAR WOULD CONTAIN SOME DRECK, BUT THERE REALLY *ISN'T* ANY." - SUSAN ROGERS

EVENT OF THE YEAR
COVID GIGS

"IT FELT LIKE WE'D PULLED SOMETHING OFF."

Virtual communion: Laura Marling, in-venue livestream pioneer, at the Union Chapel, Islington, north London, June 6, 2020.

Getty

LAURA MARLING explains to DORIAN LYNSKEY how she captured the "euphoria of congregation", online.

LAURA MARLING's world tour barely got off the ground. After just five dates in Australia, she got out of New Zealand the day before the borders were closed in March. Back home in north London, her calendar wiped clean by Covid-19, she decided to bring forward her seventh album, *Song For Our Daughter*, from August to April. "I'd been sitting on it for nearly two years so I was sick of it already," she says. But how to promote it?

"I definitely wouldn't be doing any performances from home because I think they look naff and I don't want people to experience my music in that way. So a discussion began about what is not naff. What circumstances does it take to put you in the mindset of an event?"

Her manager suggested two ticketed livestreamed shows (one for European fans, one for the US) at Islington's Union Chapel, her local venue, on June 6. Several artists have since streamed venue-based shows, whether in real time (Sleaford Mods at the 100 Club) or pre-recorded (Fontaines D.C. at Dublin's Kilmainham Gaol), but Marling was an early adopter, just days after the UK's full lockdown was lifted. "I was on the frontline," she jokes. "It was just exciting to be out of the house."

It was a strange experience. Marling's 30-strong sound and video crew were all masked and, except for her gloved guitar tech, socially distanced. When she finished her first song, a 12-minute version of 2013's Take The Night Off, the absence of applause was unnerving. "It was a nail-biting experience before," she says. "Is the stream going to work? Is it going to look good enough? Am I going to faint? It felt like we'd pulled something off. I didn't humiliate myself."

Marling later performed with 22 musicians at the BBC Proms in September and is now pondering how to compensate for the loss of "the euphoria of congregation" with a more theatrical presentation. "You can only do that once. It wasn't a huge financial success, to say the least, but I think there is a way to do different things and to take them much further, like Stop Making Sense. You're not watching something that's lacking an audience; you're watching something that was made for a home experience." She admires Idiot Prayer, the solo concert movie that Nick Cave recorded at Alexandra Palace in June and has since released in cinemas, with an accompanying live album. "I thought it was beautiful. It had real gravitas to it. He's hugely aesthetic in a way that I'm not and I found that satisfying."

While many artists are selling tickets for 2021, Marling doesn't expect to tour again until 2022. "I don't know how people are booking shows that are so clearly, to me, going to be cancelled. I admire the optimism but I'm not that way wired. I don't think until there's a vaccine there's a responsible way of putting on a show." The Van Morrison-pioneered compromise of socially distanced concerts does not appeal. "You don't want to hear 20 people clapping."

With the release of the second album by LUMP, her duo with Tunng's Mike Lindsay, indefinitely postponed, Marling has spent much of 2020 bunkered down in her home studio. "I was hoping this album would allow Laura Marling to rest for a bit and LUMP to take over, but I don't think that's going to be the case now," she says with melancholy. "It is a sad time for music. I've been blessed with an occupation."

Has making music filled the void?

"The void was still there, but I could somewhat keep it at bay."

> "I DON'T THINK UNTIL THERE'S A *VACCINE* THERE'S A RESPONSIBLE WAY OF PUTTING ON A SHOW."

SOUNDTRACKS

Compiled by ANDREW MALE

1 **WARREN ELLIS** This Train I Ride (INVADA)

2 **ADRIAN CORKER** Tin Star: Liverpool (CONSTRUCTIVE)

3 **REMATE** Neboa (SELLO DISCOGRÁFICO RTVE)

4 **CLARK** Daniel Isn't Real (UNIVERSAL/DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON)

5 **SCHRECKEN & PETER KUTIN** The Trouble With Being Born (VENTIL)

6 **BLANCK MASS** Calm With Horses (INVADA)

7 **WILLIAM TYLER** Music From First Cow (MERGE)

8 **COLIN STETSON** Color Out Of Space (WAXWORK)

9 **BRIAN ENO** Rams (UMC)

10 **BEN SALISBURY, THE INSECTS AND GEOFF BARROW** Devs (INVADA)

BLUES

Compiled by TONY RUSSELL

1 **SHEMEKIA COPELAND** Uncivil War (ALLIGATOR)

2 **WATERMELON SLIM** Traveling Man (NORTHERN BLUES)

3 **ELVIN BISHOP & CHARLIE MUSSELWHITE** 100 Years Of Blues (ALLIGATOR)

4 **JOHN LEE HOOKER** Documenting The Sensation Recordings 1948–52 (ACE)

5 **KIRK FLETCHER** My Blues Pathway (CLEOPATRA)

6 **NEW MOON JELLY ROLL FREEDOM ROCKERS** Volume I (STONY PLAIN)

7 **BEN LEVIN** Carryout Or Delivery (VIZZTONE)

8 **KIM WILSON** Take Me Back!: The Bigtone Sessions (M. C.)

9 **FRANCK L. GOLDWASSER** Sweet Little Black Spider (SLIMBYRD)

10 **BOBBY RUSH** Rawer Than Raw (DEEP RUSH/THIRTY TIGERS)

30

SAM LEE

Old Wow

COOKING VINYL

An environmental activist, former burlesque dancer and diligent scholar of musical tradition, Lee treated folk with characteristic respect but also innovation on his third album. One auspicious collaborator, Bernard Butler, called it "The best record I've ever produced", while The Moon Shines Bright matched Lee's soulful tenor with another star of old British indie – the lesser-spotted Elizabeth Fraser, uncanny voice of the Cocteau Twins. **Standout track:** *The Moon Shines Bright*

29

THUNDERCAT

It Is What It Is

BRAINFEEDER

For all his formidable jazz chops and yacht rock aspirations, Stephen 'Thundercat' Bruner remained an endearingly scrappy figure on his fourth solo album, pursuing his smooth funk and Steely Dan fantasies in a quirky rather than overly fussy way. No Michael McDonald this time, but a starry cast included Kamasi Washington and Childish Gambino, as Thundercat flipped between trademark goofiness and profound mourning for friend/rapper Mac Miller. **Standout track:** *Dragonball Durag*

28

SHIRLEY COLLINS

Heart's Ease

DOMINO

Collins' remarkable 2016 comeback album *Lodestar* showed a folk legend returning from decades of silence with a clutch of songs from a bleak strain of traditional music. *Heart's Ease*, though, was a warmer, more companionable set, looser and more joyful as Collins – with Ian Kearey on her old dulcimer-banjo – unearthed lost family songs, including one written in the early '60s by first husband, Austin John Marshall, about their young family. **Standout track:** *Sweet Greens And Blues*

27

TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES
STEPHEN MALKMUS

STEPHEN MALKMUS

Traditional Techniques

DOMINO

After 2019's synth-heavy cold wave departure *Groove Denied*, the eternally quizzical Malkmus took another left turn for his ninth post-Pavement album. This time, the vibe was a kind of heady acid folk, with key input from Matt Sweeney and Decemberist Chris Funk, and Afghan instrumentation providing authentic hippy trail trim. They suited SM's serpentine jams perfectly. **Standout track:** *Shadowbanned*

26

KHRUANGBIN

Mordechai

NIGHT TIME STORIES

If the Houston trio's first two albums became word-of-mouth cult hits, the popularity of their Leon Bridges collaboration, *Texas Sun*, pushed Khruangbin precariously towards the mainstream. Their solution? Embrace it, stylishly, by adding subtle vocals to their global jukebox instrumentals. The result? A creative impasse avoided, without losing any of the laidback grooviness and cocktail hour élan that initially made them so charming. **Standout track:** *So We Won't Forget*

25

SPARKS

A Steady Drip Drip Drip

BMG

The Mael brothers' plans for omnipresence in 2020 were hamstrung with two films – the Leos Carax-directed musical, Annette; and an Edgar Wright-helmed band documentary – delayed by the pandemic. Still, this 24th studio long-player was ample recompense: *A Steady Drip Drip Drip* worked as an object lesson in how lengthy and auspicious careers can nurture risk and eccentricity rather than diluting them. Madder than ever, basically. **Standout track:** *Lawnmower*

24

MOSES BOYD

Dark Matter

EXODUS

No stranger to MOJO's end of year charts thanks to his feisty duo work with Binker Golding, drummer Boyd cemented his place as one of the London jazz scene's most forward-thinking players with this solo effort. Familiar names like Nubya Garcia alongside sundry vocalists were incorporated into the mix, but it was Boyd's beat science and experimental tendencies that dominated: a vision that drew on the Aphex Twin as much as Max Roach. **Standout Track:** *Only You*

23

SHABAKA & THE ANCESTORS

We Are Sent Here By History

IMPULSE!

Shabaka Hutchings' habit of shifting effortlessly from one project to another – Sons Of Kemet in 2018, The Comet Is Coming in 2019 – saw him returning to lead the South African Ancestors in a second rich engagement with spiritual jazz. The context and musical agenda might have changed, but the soulfulness of Hutchings' tenor sax remained an exhilarating constant. **Standout track:** *You've Been Called*

22

Thanks for the dance
LEONARD COHEN

LEONARD COHEN

Thanks For The Dance

COLUMBIA

Cohen's last waltz, released at the very end of 2019, was that rarity: a posthumous album that felt like a cohesive piece of work rather than a commercial tactic. Directed by son Adam, it took recordings of Cohen reciting his poems, and set them into empathetic musical settings staffed by old collaborators (Jennifer Warnes, the lutist Javier Mas) and new ones (Feist, Beck). A fitting close to the valedictory run that began with 2012's *Old Ideas*. **Standout track:** *Happens To The Heart*

21

MARK LANEGAN
STRAIGHT SONGS OF SORROW

MARK LANEGAN

Straight Songs Of Sorrow

HEAVENLY

Envisaged as a companion piece to Lanegan's unstinting memoir, *Straight Songs Of Sorrow* emerged as a more substantial work than 2019's *Somebody's Knocking*. Alongside the pitch-black electronica of his recent records, Lanegan re-engaged with the folk-blues of his formative solo albums, recruited auspicious accomplices – John Paul Jones and Warren Ellis – and sang of his friendship with his fellow unlikely Seattle survivor, Dylan Carlson. **Standout track:** *At Zero Below*

In 2020, ethereal soulster **MOSES SUMNEY** played with his sexual and racial identity, released one extraordinary album in two chapters – before and after lockdown – and discovered he was an artist uncannily attuned to the spirit of the times. "I've always been the outsider," he tells **TOM DOYLE**.

Photography by **MOSES SUMNEY**

OUT ON HIS PORCH IN THE BLUE RIDGE Mountains of Asheville, North Carolina, Moses Sumney watches rabbits and squirrels skitter by. "I think I saw a raccoon last night too," he marvels, as he kicks aside some snow chains and settles down to talk. Sumney has been an Asheville resident for two years now, having passed through the mountain city on his first US tour in 2014 and finally relocated here, from Los Angeles, in 2018.

"I fell in love with it," he says. "I would come back each year to write and to kind of meditate and get away from the big city. I wanted to leave LA and I did a little stint in London but, ultimately, this is where I wanted to be."

There is a sense that life in Asheville is still something of a novelty for Sumney. It is the latest destination in a journey that began in San Bernardino, California, detoured to Ghana, homeland of his pastor parents, when he was 10, and looped back to LA six years later. This latest move to North Carolina was one successfully plotted by the ADHD-diagnosed singer to help sharpen his creative focus.

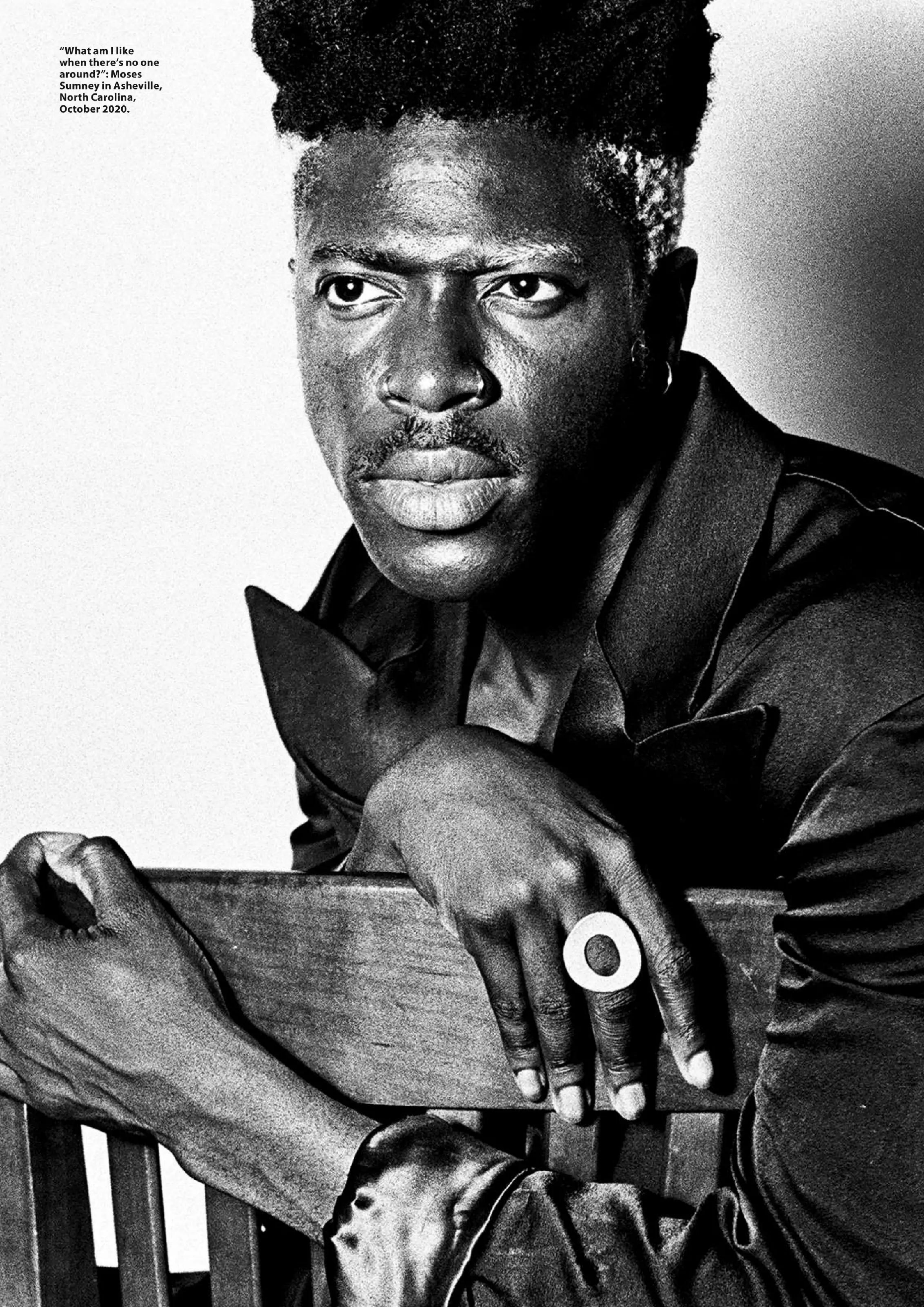
"I wanted to live somewhere where I knew absolutely no one and I had no opportunity to be distracted or deterred from my goal," he says. "My point of discovery the past two years has just been, 'What am I like when there's no one around? When I'm not afraid I'm gonna run into someone I know?'"

The result was *græ*, Sumney's hugely ambitious and brilliantly-realised second album, which succeeded in imagining a previously uncharted musical hinterland inhabited by Nina Simone and Cocteau Twins, The Temptations and Radiohead (Ed O'Brien took to Twitter to proclaim *græ* an "incredible record"). A double no less, it was released in two instalments in February and May of this year.

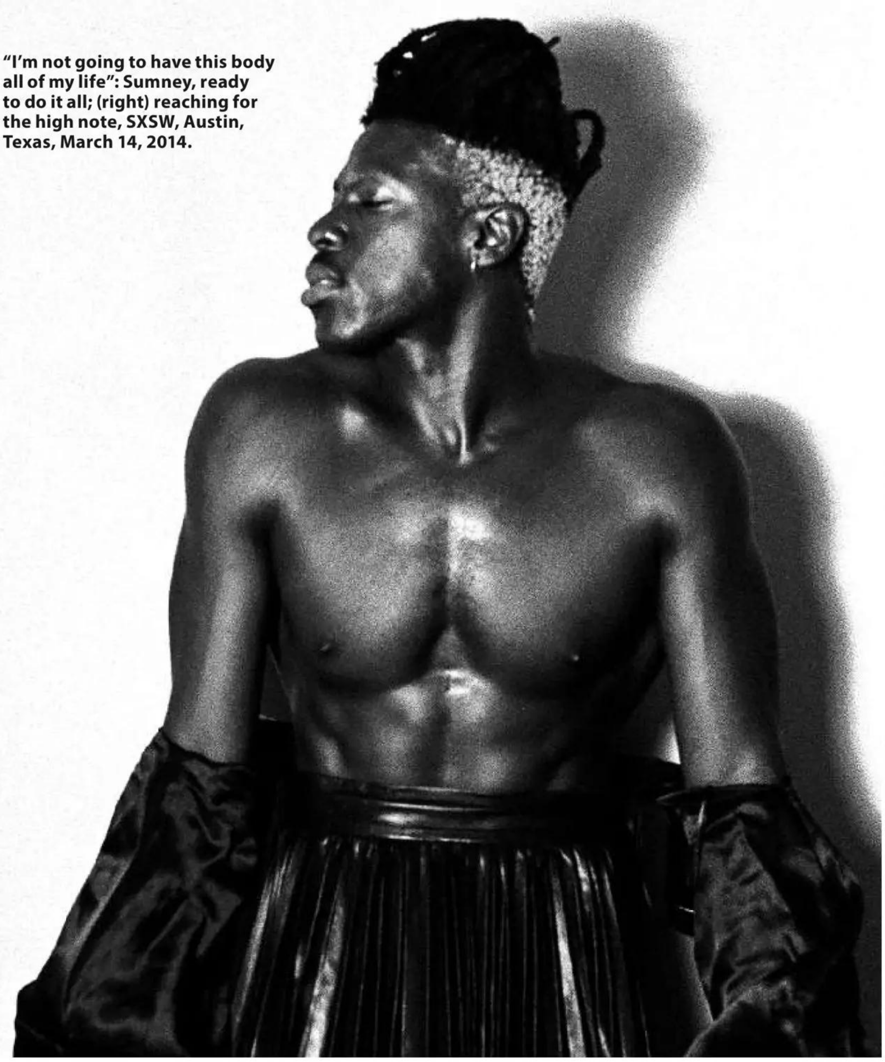
"I didn't want to make a double album," insists Sumney with a baritone chuckle. "I wanted to make a short album. But there were so many songs that were coming out of me, and I believe strongly in following the call of the art. As much as I tried to fight it and cut and cut and cut and shorten the record, I couldn't cut it any further than the 20 tracks. I had so much to say."

Sumney is an artist in tune with our times, particularly 2020, with *græ* investigating the blurred areas between gender and race and sexuality. Elsewhere, in Rank & File from his 2018 EP Black In Deep Red, he pre-echoed the Black Lives Matter movement with his assertion, "This police state is much too old". "I think you'd be hard pressed to find American black people who haven't been harassed by police," he stresses now. "I've been pulled over an extraordinary amount of times by the police and asked dumb questions."

Both of Sumney's albums to date explore states of self-identity – in *græ*'s 2017 predecessor *Aromanticism*, it was the absence of interest in love. By his reckoning, this deep inner-searching is both his enduring fascination and great struggle. "Y'know, in my music I'm analysing my own thoughts and feelings and being really honest about calling them forth," he says. "But also analysing how my own perception of myself is affected by society. I wouldn't say that it was a journey to finding myself in that way. But I just enjoy grappling ➢



“What am I like when there’s no one around?”: Moses Sumney in Asheville, North Carolina, October 2020.



"I'm not going to have this body all of my life": Sumney, ready to do it all; (right) reaching for the high note, SXSW, Austin, Texas, March 14, 2014.

> **"SOMETIMES I JUST DAYDREAM SO MUCH I DRIVE PAST MY HOUSE GOING HOME."**
> **Moses Sumney**

≺ with that. And maybe what I've found is that, like, it doesn't matter," he laughs.

GROWING UP, MOSES SUMNEY – 6 FOOT 4 INCHES tall and (like his music) imposing, impressive and unusual – understandably found it tough to fit in anywhere. "I was always kind of shy and quiet and insular and trying not to stand out. But the reality is I've never had the option of fitting in anywhere. I've always been the outsider."

Life as a kid in San Bernardino seeded his feelings of apartness. "San Bernardino is very weird," he says. "It's in this part of California called the Inland Empire, which is essentially like a large basin and so it's very hot. It's a really big city, but it's also a forgotten place. It's not really known for anything, except, maybe, poverty."

Hitting the onset of his teenage years in Ghana only intensified matters, as Sumney collided with cultural barriers and yet at the same time ran the gauntlet of typical peer-to-peer punishments for the dreamy-headed loner. "I mean, ostracisation, bullying," he says. "I got beat up a lot. Teachers hated me. The works, really."

His breezy demeanour when recalling these memories suggests there is no lingering trauma, though?

"Oh, I'm sure there is lingering trauma," he responds, brightly. "But, y'know, life is trauma. You just kinda go with them and keep pushing."

As a teenager, Sumney found strength – and vital inspiration – in the music of American neo-soul singer Indie.Arie, particularly what he calls the "empowering" slow lane groover Brown Skin from her 2001 album, *Acoustic Soul*. "It was so revelatory to me to hear anyone celebrating brown skin," he says. "As a dark-skinned person, it was a thing that I felt was hated about me. So, that was, like, an 'a-ha' moment. The idea that an attribute of mine could be beautiful but… larger than that, the idea that I could create music that meant something. That definitely gave me kind of context."

Filled with purpose back in the US, Sumney studied creative writing at UCLA, harbouring an ambition to become a novelist, before realising that he lacked the discipline. Instead, he ran around trying to be all things at once – radio DJ, president of the sign language club, writer on the school newspaper, singer in an a cappella group – before intensive Googling resulted in a self-diagnosis of ADHD (confirmed two years later by a doctor).

There was an oasis of calm to be found in making music. Writing songs alone, Sumney began "recording my voice obsessively and playing it back", before venturing out to perform them solo, layering his harmonies with a loop pedal, first in campus coffee bars and then further afield in LA. He was, he admits, terrified. "I always felt like it was my calling and I had no choice," he says, before a tad melodramatically adding, "I had to do it and if I didn't do it, I would die. And though certainly it was scary, there was also a desperation to do it."

An online clip of one of Sumney's performances grabbed the attention of producer and TV On The Radio founder Dave Sitek, who loaned the nascent singer a 4-track recorder on which he made his debut EP, Mid-City Island, in 2014. On those first five tracks and his subsequent *Aromanticism* debut album, Sumney unveiled his flexible, octave-sweeping voice and built a sonic world that recalled the '80s dreamscapes of 4AD's This Mortal Coil and Cocteau Twins as much as anything approximating neo-soul.

Karen O, of the Sitek-produced Yeah Yeah Yeahs, later remembered being wowed when she first heard Mid-City Island: "Dave had lent Moses a 4-track and he played some music that Moses had made on it. Enter dream land. I'm telling you, the kid has got it… such sweetness and soulfulness."

Furthermore, Sumney's reverie-inducing atmospheres didn't sound like anything created by someone who was restless or having trouble concentrating. "That's interesting," he says, clearly unconvinced. "I think you could say that my ADHD manifests itself in the way that I arrange music. The way it changes and morphs and transmogrifies over the course of the song. There's always constant shifting happening."

These days, Sumney's ADHD sees him trying (and sometimes failing) to avoid too much in the way of online activity. "I have to limit my internet usage and I have to set rules for myself with my

Moses Sumney, Getty (4)

Getting it together: performing at the Haven Festival, Copenhagen, 2018; (above) Sumney chills in Palm Springs 2016.

phone,” he explains. “’Cos I can just get lost. I have a really bad sense of time. I’m always late. Sometimes I just daydream so much I drive past my house going home (*laughs*). There’s so many different levels of it.”

Looking back at 2020, Moses Sumney is no longer sure that it was a good idea to release *græ* in two parts. “It worked for some people and it didn’t work for other people,” he muses. “One of the ways in which it worked was because of the pandemic. If my [whole] album had come out in February and then the pandemic happened, I think people would’ve moved on and forgotten about it.”

In an episode of NPR’s Tiny Desk Concert filmed alone in his Asheville home studio in August, Sumney jokily commented on the timeliness of *græ*’s staggered, pre- and post-lockdown release. “All of the songs are about loneliness and isolation,” he deadpanned to camera. “So… who’s laughing now?”

“Yeah, it was timely, for better or for worse,” he reasons to MOJO. “I mean, my work has been about these themes for years. But I think some people found solace in that. I think they felt seen and heard and could find a place of refuge in the album during those periods of isolation which were tough for some people.”

For Sumney himself, being remote from others has only accelerated his personal and creative growth, whether it be through the increasing flamboyance of his image, or honing the impressive pro-dancer-like moves he can be seen busting in the video for *græ*’s lead single, Virile. “I’ve definitely been emerging, rapidly and intensely,” he says. “Especially in the past two years since I moved to what I would call relative isolation.”

That said, he hasn’t been writing songs at all this year, in his first self-enforced break from musical creativity since his teens. He’s currently hatching vague plans, however, to make both a folk album and an R&B album.

“I’m not going to have this body, I’m not going to be able to move, I’m not going to be able to sing these crazy high notes all of my life,” he concludes with an enormous laugh, as MOJO detects Sumney’s period of relative inactivity giving way to something once again altogether more frenetic. “So, I need to do it all.” Ⓜ

BEST MUSIC FILMS OF 2020

1 MILES DAVIS: BIRTH OF THE COOL

(DIR: STANLEY NELSON)

The seemingly impossible task – encapsulate all the dark magus’s musical metamorphoses in a way that felt more than perfunctory – brilliantly accomplished, with the significance of his beating at the hands of NY police in August 1959 amply explored, and illuminating contributions by (especially) Wayne Shorter and late ex-wife Frances Taylor. Unmissable.

2 KING ROCKER: A FILM ABOUT ROBERT LLOYD AND THE NIGHTINGALES

(DIR: MICHAEL CUMMING)

Writer and stand-up Stewart Lee salutes diehard square peg Lloyd and his mistrust for anything aspirational (the birthright of all West Midlanders). A statue of King Kong that briefly stood in Birmingham City Centre is a knowingly crap leitmotif. Most importantly, footage of the current-vintage Nightingales proves that, at 61, Lloyd is more potent than ever.

3 IDIOT PRAYER

(DIR: NICK CAVE)

Man plays songs on piano in an empty Alexandra Palace. Boring, right? Wrong. The nuances of Cave’s compositions – especially those more regularly abused by the full-on Bad Seeds – are given space to unfurl. Plus the cavernous setting works as a powerful metaphor for our current internal exiles and the Cave family’s recent desolation. Riveting.

4 WHITE RIOT

(DIR: RUBIKA SHAH)

Pauline Black, Dennis Bovell, Topper Headon, Tom Robinson and more remember Rock Against Racism – the peak of UK punk rock and reggae’s concerted engagement with Britain’s social fabric. Great music and footage and a timely reminder that it takes eternal vigilance to resist fascism and race hate.

5 CREEM: AMERICA’S ONLY ROCK ’N’ ROLL MAGAZINE

(DIR: SCOTT CRAWFORD)

Alma mater to former and current MOJO scribes (Bill Holdship, Dave Marsh, Jaan Uhelszki, the late Ben Edmonds…), Detroit’s Creem gave the finger to Rolling Stone while (as Uhelszki, who wrote the film, makes clear) providing an alternative to its lazy chauvinism. More fun than a doc on rock hacks should be!

Recommended: *Mr Soul (dir: Melissa Haizlip, Sam Pollard); Laurel Canyon: A Place In Time (dir: Alison Ellwood); Beastie Boys Story (dir: Spike Jonze); Once Were Brothers: Robbie Robertson And The Band (dir: Daniel Roher); Dennis & Lois (dir: Chris Cassidy)*

Cool Miles Davis with French actress Jeanne Moreau, Paris, 1957.

20

NUBYA GARCIA

Source

CONCORD

Another tireless fixture of the UK jazz boom, saxophonist Garcia was slower into the spotlight than the likes of Shabaka Hutchings, guesting with her contemporaries and working in bigger ensembles such as Nérija and Maisha. Her solo debut, though, was well worth the wait, artfully incorporating nu-soul, cumbia rhythms and, most strikingly, dub reggae into the elegant but exuberant mix, while staying true to her foundational jazz impulses.

Standout track: *Source*

19

SAULT

Untitled (Black Is)

FOREVER LIVING ORIGINALS

The anonymous SAULT were 2020's stealthiest breakout stars, releasing two albums of Afro-futurist soul (June's *Untitled (Black Is)* and September's *Untitled (Rise)*) that shared an empowering mission and vision with the Black Lives Matter movement. Eventually identified as producer Inflo and vocalist Cleo Sol, unmasking did not diminish their potency. Regular Inflo collaborator Michael Kiwanuka turned up too, fronting the Afrobeat rave-up Bow.

Standout track: *Eternal Life*

18

Got To Be Tough!
TOOTS
AND THE MAYTALS

TOOTS AND THE MAYTALS

Got To Be Tough

TROJAN JAMAICA

One of 2020's many cruelties was the Covid-19 death of Toots Hibbert just weeks after he released an album celebrating the reggae trailblazer's resilience. *Got To Be Tough* was Hibbert's first album of all-new songs in a decade, a meaty blend of reggae and soul, with the 77-year-old joined by Sly Dunbar, Zak Starkey, Cyril Neville and, on a sprightly cover of Three Little Birds, Ziggy Marley. A heavy hitter, to the end.

Standout track: *Just Brutal*

17

LAURA MARLING

Song For Our Daughter

CHRYSALIS

Marling's back catalogue is unusually substantial for a 30-year-old, yet the part-time psychoanalysis student's seventh album persuasively felt like her best: juggling influences old (Joni, Leonard Cohen) and newer (McCartney, Maya Angelou), even as it confidently asserted Marling's own persona. Thoughtful, eloquent, healthily intolerant of "bullshit", *Song For Our Daughter* was a forensic study of womanhood.

Standout track: *Song For Our Daughter*

16

IDIOT PRAYER

NICK CAVE

Idiot Prayer

BAD SEED LTD

As spring turned to summer, online lockdown concerts evolved from ad hoc home recordings to grander productions – none grander than Cave's solo piano show in the middle of Alexandra Palace. The music, of course, was just as grave and beautiful without the visuals: a life's work, both canonical hits and long-neglected deeper cuts, reduced to its sombre essence. A new song, too: the ultimately optimistic Euthanasia.

Standout track: *Brompton Oratory*

15

FRAZEY FORD
U KIN B THE SUN

FRAZEY FORD

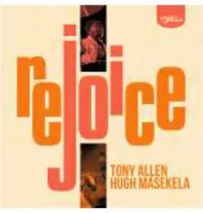
U Kin B The Sun

ARTS & CRAFTS

The six years between the Canadian singer's second and third solo long-players were tough – the discovery and death of her biological father, her brother's death, too. But *U Kin B The Sun* bristled with defiance and triumph against the odds: sinewy country-soul and tender funk with a spiritual wonder at the natural world, and a hopefulness in a new generation's political engagement. The kids, she noted, were having none of it.

Standout track: *U Kin B The Sun*

14



TONY ALLEN & HUGH MASEKELA

Rejoice

WORLD CIRCUIT

What was meant to be a tribute to one musical great soon enough, tragically, became a memorial for two. The African giants first met in Lagos in 1977, but only began work on *Rejoice* in 2010 in London. Allen and producer Nick Gold completed the project after Masekela's death in 2018, the match-up of township jazz and indestructible beats finally arriving last March – a month before Allen passed, too.

Standout track: *Never (Lagos Never Gonna Be The Same)*

13

MOSES SUMNEY

Græ

JAGJAGUWAR

A dream-soul treatise on "the romance of the undefined", the Blue Ridge Mountain-based singer's second album came in two parts, released separately, with no little sense of occasion. Sumney worked in the interstices between certainties, questioning gender and identity stereotypes, and was similarly elusive of genre. Prince? Radiohead? Billie Holiday? Billy Mackenzie? They all seemed to find a place in this fluid and audacious 21st century concept album.

Standout track: *Virile*

12

IDLES

Ultra Mono

PARTISAN

Not just remarkable for featuring Jamie Cullum and The Jesus Lizard's David Yow on *the same track* – relentless riff monster Kill Them With Kindness – the Bristol rabble-rousers' third took their millennial upgrade of sheet metal post-punk and gnarly US hardcore to the next level. An anthemic state of the nation address both earnest and witheringly sarcastic, even as frontman Joe Talbot embraced his heroically Bono-ish ambitions, *Ultra Mono* was the full bloom of Idles' pop devilry.

Standout track: *Danke*

11

On Sunset
PAUL WELLER

PAUL WELLER

On Sunset

POLYDOR

The restless musical curiosity that has served Weller so well was in dazzlingly full effect on solo album Number 15, a multi-hued, dancefloor-adjacent volte-face after 2018's bucolic, mostly acoustic *True Meanings*. Here was Weller at his most soulful, eclectic and fearless, melding disco and *musique concrète* on the same track, drawing on the influences of Mayfield and Hathaway, hymning LA (of all places), even tapping the antic spirit of The Style Council.

Standout track: *Mirrorball*

WORLD

Compiled by DAVID HUTCHEON

1. **JANE BIRKIN**
   Oh! Pardon, Tu Dormais… (WRASSE/UNIVERSAL)
2. **BENJAMIN BIOLAY**
   Grand Prix (BLUE WRASSE)
3. **BAB L'BLUZ**
   Nayda! (REAL WORLD)
4. **TONY ALLEN & HUGH MASEKELA**
   Rejoice (WORLD CIRCUIT)
5. **TAMIKREST**
   Tamotaït (GLITTERBEAT)
6. **CÉU**
   Apká! (SIX DEGREES)
7. **KELEKETLA!**
   Keleketla! (AHEAD OF OUR TIME)
8. **AFEL BOCOUM**
   Lindé (WORLD CIRCUIT)
9. **AK DAN GWANG CHIL**
   Such Is Life (ADANGEBAN)
10. **SONGHOY BLUES**
    Optimisme (TRANSGRESSIVE)

FOLK

Compiled by COLIN IRWIN

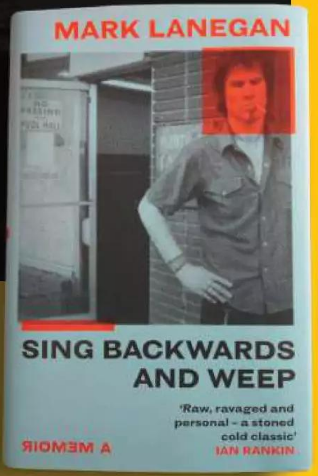
1. **BONNY LIGHT HORSEMAN**
   Bonny Light Horseman (37D03D)
2. **PETER KNIGHT'S GIGSPANNER BIG BAND**
   Natural Invention (GIGSPANNER)
3. **SHIRLEY COLLINS**
   Heart's Ease (DOMINO)
4. **STICK IN THE WHEEL**
   Hold Fast (FROM HERE)
5. **SUZZY ROCHE & LUCY WAINWRIGHT ROCHE**
   I Can Still Hear You (STORYSOUND)
6. **FAY HIELD**
   Wrackline (TOPIC)
7. **WILL POUND**
   A Day Will Come (LULUBUG)
8. **BAND OF BURNS**
   The Thread (ORD BAN MUSIC)
9. **ELIZA CARTHY & BEN SEAL**
   Through That Sound My Secret Was Made Known (HEM HEM)
10. **SETH LAKEMAN**
    A Pilgrim's Tale (BMG)

"I JUST LET IT ALL FUCKING HANG OUT"

Don't cry no tears: Mark Lanegan breathes deep.

THE SHORTLIST

1. **SING BACKWARDS & WEEP** Mark Lanegan (WHITE RABBIT)
2. **13TH FLOOR ELEVATORS: A VISUAL HISTORY** Paul Drummond (ANTHOLOGY EDITIONS)
3. **BLOOD: A MEMOIR** Allison Moorer (DA CAPO)
4. **SMALL HOURS: THE LONG NIGHT OF JOHN MARTYN** Graeme Thomson (OMNIBUS)
5. **BROKEN GREEK** Pete Paphides (QUERCUS)
6. **A NEW DAY YESTERDAY: UK PROGRESSIVE ROCK & THE 1970S** Mike Barnes (OMNIBUS)
7. **ODETTA: A LIFE IN MUSIC AND PROTEST** Ian Zack (BEACON PRESS)
8. **HAWKWIND: DAYS OF THE UNDERGROUND** Joe Banks (STRANGE ATTRACTOR)
9. **I WANNA BE YOURS** John Cooper Clarke (PICADOR)
10. **MIND OVER MATTER: THE MYTHS AND MYSTERIES OF DETROIT'S FORTUNE RECORDS** Billy Miller and Michael Hurtt (KICKS BOOKS)



In print MARK LANEGAN journeyed from self-discovery to collateral damage. He bares all about baring all to KEITH CAMERON.

MUSIC BOOK OF THE YEAR

IN DECREEING Mark Lanegan's Sing Backwards And Weep, "Raw, ravaged and personal – a stoned cold classic", crime writer Ian Rankin recognised a fellow master of the dark arts. Whereas Rankin deals in fiction, though, every hard-boiled twist and primeval turn of Mark Lanegan's slog through the drug-drenched badlands of grunge-era Seattle was true. The reader wondered how he had survived, let alone added 'accomplished prose stylist' to 'prolific recording artist' and 'legendary singer' in his arsenal of epithets. Lanegan has a simple answer for that: "Pure dumb luck."

Congratulations – Sing Backwards And Weep is MOJO's Book Of The Year.

"Cool!"

Do you have a theory why it's struck such a chord?

"Not a lot of books get as gritty. When I was getting ready to write it, [the late chef] Tony Bourdain told me that to make a book that would be anything other than a shitty rock bio, I would have to find a level of honesty I would be uncomfortable with. So I just let it all fucking hang out."

You read the audio book – how was that?

"Brutal. I thought I was going to knock that thing out in two days. Three weeks later I was on Chapter 4. I've done a fair amount of voiceover stuff, and I thought this would be the easiest part of the process. But since I was doing it at my place – fine for making records but not really soundproof – I had to do it at night. Since the lights made a noise, I had to do it in the dark, in freezing cold, with my wife recording it. She had to hear me reading about stuff I did 25 years ago, and was like, 'That's what you do now!' I probably should have had someone else do the recordings."

Given how well it's been received, might you consider a sequel?

"Not at all. I enjoy writing, just not *that* kind of writing. And since, in this day and age, you've got to find alternative streams of income, I need to write. And the quickest way to end my writing career would be to write a Part 2 of this book. It could never be the same. But I think I'll write fiction next. A fictional version of… events."

Might you possibly draw upon your own experience for this work of fiction?

"(*Laughs*) I might! It might include stuff I didn't include, or was unable to include, in the first go-round. Fictional things, of course."

Have you received any feedback from the other people in your story?

"Any death threats?! Some people were unhappy about the way I depicted them. It's all from memory, written from the standpoint of 25 years ago, and not necessarily the way I feel about anybody today."

There are many unflattering portraits, not least of yourself. Did you seek approval from certain people in advance?

"I ran it by everybody who was still alive that I cared about. And everybody was totally cool. I didn't get everything right – anybody I may have depicted in a way that wasn't true to their experience, then I apologise. I tried to get hold of Van Conner from Screaming Trees about 50 times, but he ignored all that, so I just went ahead and wrote it. And of course, that made those guys unhappy. So be it."

The book displays an acute self-analysis – did the act of writing aid that process?

"In the timeframe I was writing about, I wasn't too self-aware. I stumbled from one disaster to another and let the chips fall. But in subsequent years I've come to realise things about myself, my behaviours and motivations, and yeah, there was more to be revealed in writing the book. I had to go back and turn over the rocks, and it wasn't too pleasant what I found underneath. But there's a perverse part of me that took delight in writing those cringeworthy moments."

Finally, what's the best thing you've heard all year?

"My favourite this year is Bill Callahan's *Gold Record*. It's brilliant. All his records are."

> "I HAD TO GO BACK AND TURN OVER THE ROCKS, AND IT WASN'T TOO PLEASANT WHAT I FOUND UNDERNEATH."

Travis Keller

JAZZ

Compiled by ANDY COWAN

1 NUBYA GARCIA
Source (CONCORD JAZZ)

2 IRREVERSIBLE ENTANGLEMENTS
Who Sent You? (INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM)

3 MOSES BOYD
Dark Matter (EXODUS)

4 SPAZA
Uprize! (MUSHROOM HALF HOUR)

5 JON HASSELL
Seeing Through Sound (NDEYA)

6 GOGO PENGUIN
GoGo Penguin (BLUE NOTE)

7 ROB MAZUREK EXPLODING STAR ORCHESTRA
Dimensional Stardust (INTERNATIONAL ANTHEM/ NONESUCH)

8 PARADISE CINEMA
Paradise Cinema (GONDWANA)

9 ALAN BRAUFMAN
The Fire Still Burns (VALLEY OF SEARCH)

10 IMMANUEL WILKINS
Omega (BLUE NOTE)

ELECTRONICA

Compiled by STEPHEN WORTHY

1 BEATRICE DILLON
Workaround (PAN)

2 KELLY LEE OWENS
Inner Song (SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND)

3 K-LONE
Cape Cira (WISDOM TEETH)

4 DJ PYTHON
Mas Amable (INCIENSO)

5 CARIBOU
Suddenly (CITY SLANG)

6 THE SOFT PINK TRUTH
Shall We Go On Sinning So That Grace May Increase? (THRILL JOCKEY)

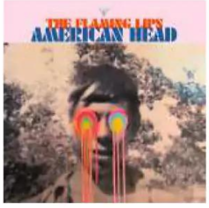
7 NAZAR
Guerrilla (HYPERDUB)

8 LUKE ABBOTT
Translate (BORDER COMMUNITY)

9 KAITLYN AURELIA SMITH
The Mosaic Of Transformation (GHOSTLY INTERNATIONAL)

10 KATIE GATELY
Loom (HOUNDSTOOTH)

10



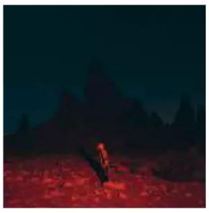
THE FLAMING LIPS

American Head
BELLA UNION

It would be misguided to expect the Lips to rein in their wilder tendencies, given that preposterous conceits have been critical to their success for nearly 40 years. Still, *American Head* was their most cohesive, approachable album in 14 years – a nostalgic, if warped, flashback to '70s smalltown America, blessed with some of their most memorable and poignant songs since *Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots*.

Standout track: *Mother I've Taken LSD*

9



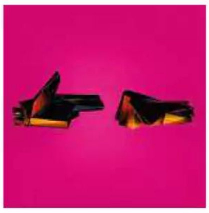
PHOEBE BRIDGERS

Punisher
DEAD OCEANS

With her second solo album, the funny, energetic and candid Californian moved to the top of Generation Z's rich crop of singer-songwriters. "I think honesty is, for me, the easiest," she told MOJO, but *Punisher* was more unfiltered than confessional, even as it updated the sensitivity of Elliott Smith, made dark jokes about Eric Clapton, and confirmed Bridgers as a major cultural character, as well as major talent.

Standout track: *Halloween*

8



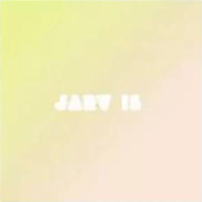
RUN THE JEWELS

RTJ4
JEWEL RUNNERS

The fourth and finest collaboration between El-P and Killer Mike was the uncompromising old school rap album 2020 needed – a muscular and inventive powerplay that felt as urgent and timely as Public Enemy's *Yo! Bum Rush The Show* did in 1987 (Miuzi Weighs A Ton was referenced). A ferocious guest-list, meanwhile, asserted Run The Jewels' across-the-board appeal, including as it did Mavis Staples, Josh Homme, Zack De La Rocha and DJ Premier.

Standout track: *Yankee And The Brave (Ep. 4)*

7



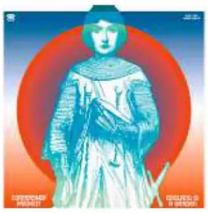
JARV IS…

Beyond The Pale
ROUGH TRADE

Britpop's multi-tasking renaissance man has occasionally behaved as if music was one of his lower priorities since Pulp split in 2002. Forming a new band – Jarv Is… – evidently reinvigorated him, since *Beyond The Pale* was his best album in decades: a fervid mix of good ideas, live recordings, esoteric pop culture references (prehistoric cave art, living statues, defunct Camden boutiques), spacerock and greasy synths, plus harp. If a disco Hawkwind appeals, this is for you.

Standout track: *Sometimes I Am Pharaoh*

6



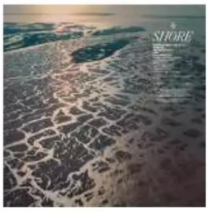
CORNERSHOP

England Is A Garden
AMPLE PLAY

How fitting that, in this year of all years, the best British comeback came from Tjinder Singh and Ben Ayres, righteous commentators on racism and the possibilities of a better, alternative England for nigh on three decades now. *England Is A Garden* was a kind of sunshine protest album, uniting belt-buckle boogie rock, dub, bubblegum, Punjabi folk and an over-arching sense of musical joy into one of their very finest long-players.

Standout track: *Highly Amplified*

5



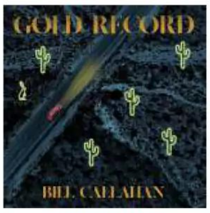
FLEET FOXES

Shore
ANTI-

After the last Fleet Foxes tour ended with broken ribs, Robin Pecknold's musical wanderings revitalised his music – resulting in *Shore*, the best, most accessible FF set since their storied 2008 debut. This fourth LP featured eye catching sub-plots – Fela's organ, a rare Beach Boys sample – but mostly it showcased Pecknold's extravagant gifts and buccaneering spirit, honouring his departed heroes with the most inclusive and uplifting songs of his career.

Standout track: *Sunblind*

4



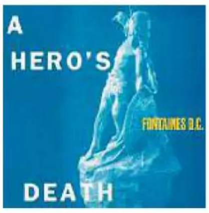
BILL CALLAHAN

Gold Record
DRAG CITY

At this point, Callahan's immense craftsmanship – and high ranking in MOJO end of year lists – are pretty much guaranteed. After *Shepherd In A Sheepskin Vest*, 2019's startlingly personal examination of bereavement and domestic bliss, *Gold Record* returned to understated but vivid storytelling – with a crucial twist. Where once Callahan seemed misanthropic, his 10 new tales were uncommonly humane and kind, if no less surprising.

Standout track: *The Mackenzies*

3



FONTAINES D.C.

A Hero's Death
PARTISAN

Too smart and awkward to be comfortable with a 'Great Hopes Of Guitar Rock' tag, Dublin's Fontaines D.C. swerved away from rowdy main stage expectations with this rapid – but far from rushed – follow-up to 2019's *Dogrel*. *A Hero's Death* found romance and depth in the gothier end of post-punk (key influence: The Cure) and a more satisfying way to move forward: as thoughtful, evolving artists rather than rebel caricatures. Success, ironically, remained a certainty.

Standout track: *A Lucid Dream*

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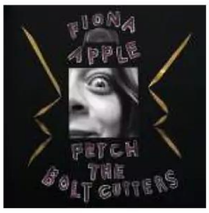


FIONA APPLE

Fetch The Bolt Cutters
EPIC

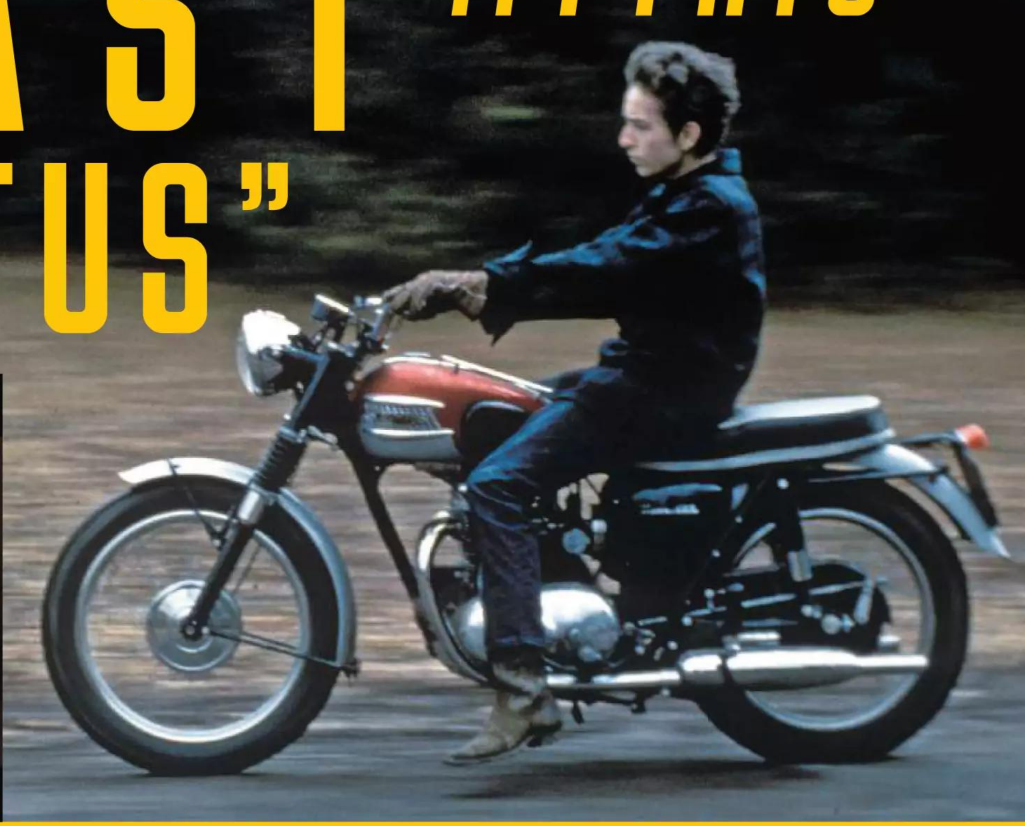
If Apple had previously seemed a brilliant, eccentric baroque pop figure, her long-awaited fifth made strikingly new creative capital out of those idiosyncrasies. Melodically and percussively unorthodox – the bones of her late pit bull played a critical role – *Fetch The Bolt Cutters* was as accessible and catchy as it was radical. A kindred spirit – if not a soundalike, exactly – to Captain Beefheart, Tom Waits, or Lindsey Buckingham at his most outré.

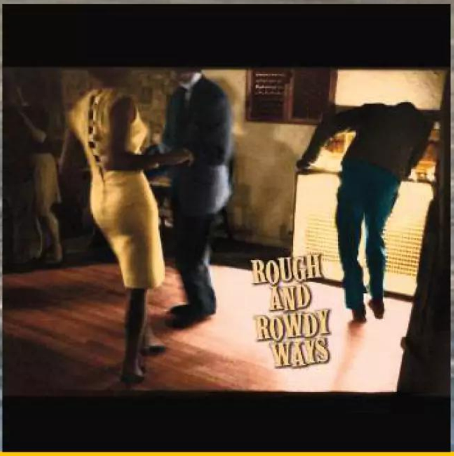
Standout track: *Ladies*

Heading for a fall: Bob Dylan accelerates into the future, 1964.

John Launois/Blackstar/Eyevine, Getty

"DYLAN'S TRUE ACCEPTANCE OF HIS VAST *MYTHIC* STATUS"





1 BOB DYLAN

ROUGH AND ROWDY WAYS

COLUMBIA

In which Robert Zimmerman finally comes to terms with being Bob Dylan. ANDREW MALE grapples with the old shapeshifter's career-defining late masterpiece.

BACK IN 2012, Bob Dylan gave one of his strangest interviews. Speaking to Rolling Stone magazine, the then 71-year-old sidestepped questions about politics to concentrate on an issue that had been bothering him: that of transfiguration. Pulling out a copy of the 1975 Harper paperback Hell's Angel: The Life And Times Of Sonny Barger, he pointed the interviewer to a passage about a biker called Bobby Zimmerman, who died in a motorbike accident in 1964.

"You're looking at somebody that's been transfigured," said Dylan. "I had a motorbike accident in 1966. So when you ask some of your questions, you're asking them to a person that doesn't exist."

It wasn't clear, but Dylan appeared to be saying that the soul of Bobby Zimmerman had fused with his, resulting in his own motorcycle crash in 1966, and leading to subsequent physical and stylistic changes down the years. Well, if the previous 54 years have all been acts of constant shapeshifting and asking "Who is Bob Dylan?", and in the wake of five years where he thought he might like to be Frank Sinatra, *Rough And Rowdy Ways* finally accepts the inevitable: "I am Bob Dylan, and no man knows my history."

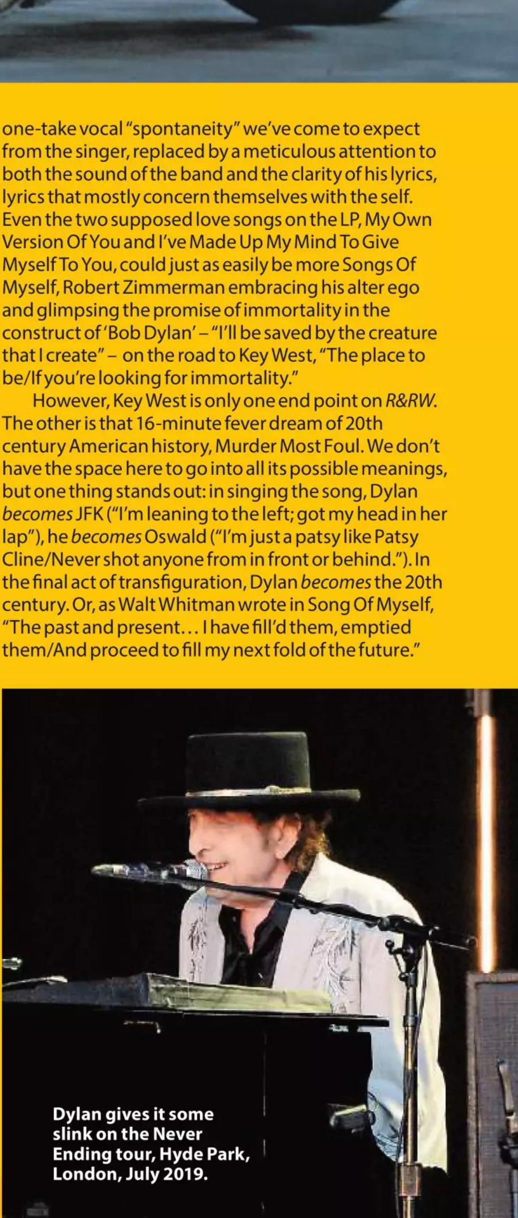
From its opening brace of tracks, I Contain Multitudes and False Prophet, *Rough And Rowdy Ways* can be read as Dylan's true acceptance of his huge, mythic status. Both songs (which arguably contain more first-person singular nominative-case personal pronouns than any other Dylan compositions) depict him as both fabrication and legend, part-built from 20th century popular culture ("I'm just like Anne Frank, like Indiana Jones") and popular song ("I go where only the lonely go"), but also something unknowable and vast ("I go right to the edge, I go right to the end").

It's the sound of a man finally at ease in his constructed identity. Possible glimpses of that could be seen on the 2019 instalment of his Never Ending Tour, where Bob performed hand on hip, "affecting a kind of *slink*," as we wrote in MOJO 311, "smoothing an eyebrow and flashing a brief unnerving grin [like some] camp 78-year-old gunslinger."

So while there is certainly temptation to read *Rough And Rowdy Ways* as Dylan's *Blackstar*, a death-shadowed last will and testament, with the track Black Rider being the most explicit point of comparison, there is one key difference; rather than readying for death, Bob is preparing for deathlessness, whilst carrying "four pistols and two large knives".

That Dylan knows he is putting down important stuff is evident in the *sound* of *R&RW*. Gone is the one-take vocal "spontaneity" we've come to expect from the singer, replaced by a meticulous attention to both the sound of the band and the clarity of his lyrics, lyrics that mostly concern themselves with the self. Even the two supposed love songs on the LP, My Own Version Of You and I've Made Up My Mind To Give Myself To You, could just as easily be more Songs Of Myself, Robert Zimmerman embracing his alter ego and glimpsing the promise of immortality in the construct of 'Bob Dylan' – "I'll be saved by the creature that I create" – on the road to Key West, "The place to be/If you're looking for immortality."

However, Key West is only one end point on *R&RW*. The other is that 16-minute fever dream of 20th century American history, Murder Most Foul. We don't have the space here to go into all its possible meanings, but one thing stands out: in singing the song, Dylan *becomes* JFK ("I'm leaning to the left; got my head in her lap"), he *becomes* Oswald ("I'm just a patsy like Patsy Cline/Never shot anyone from in front or behind."). In the final act of transfiguration, Dylan *becomes* the 20th century. Or, as Walt Whitman wrote in Song Of Myself, "The past and present… I have fill'd them, emptied them/And proceed to fill my next fold of the future."


Dylan gives it some slink on the Never Ending tour, Hyde Park, London, July 2019.

"IT'S THE SOUND OF A MAN *FINALLY* AT EASE IN HIS CONSTRUCTED IDENTITY."

“THE BEST THING I’VE HEARD ALL YEAR!”

MOJO’s favourite musicians on the tunes that took them up, up and out of themselves in a testing 2020…

GRIAN CHATTEN

Fontaines D.C.’s dashing young existentialist.

I’m going to go with *925* by [young north London indie oddballs] **Sorry** [above]. It’s just an album of amazing songs, by which I mean, like, old school craft and penmanship. It’s full of catchy choruses and riffs and simultaneously full of sentimentality but also… bile. Asha [Lorenz, singer] is such an incredible deliverer. She knows how to sound really sickened by what she’s saying. She’ll be part of the meanness and cruelty of a situation. And the music really fits that – like, the song Wolf has this kind of hellish merry-go-round quality. The other amazing thing I heard was [1978 French art-disco slink] The Sphinx by **Amanda Lear**. I heard it in a shop in Paris when we were over there doing promo and it really stunned me. It’s one of those songs that is its own character, it’s like the song wrote that character for itself. Stunning.

Oh yeah, and we’re all really into the **Baxter Dury** album, *The Night Chancers*. “I’m not your fucking friend”: that’s the best first line of an album ever.

PHOEBE BRIDGERS

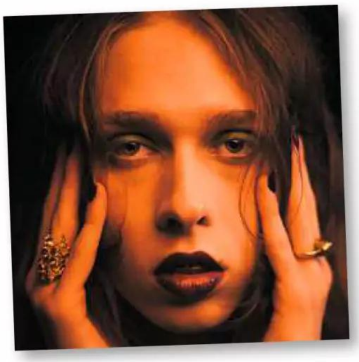
Singing the unsayable since 2014.

The best thing I’ve heard is still the **Fiona Apple** record. I like that it’s fucking unhinged. I pride myself on being able to write lyrics that other people wouldn’t write. I don’t get uncomfortable saying I hate people or overtly sexual shit, or whatever, and yet there are *so* many lines on this record that make me uncomfortable, and that’s the goal.

“I resent you for being raised right/I resent you for being tall” [Relay] is one of my favourite lyrics. But also, “You raped me in the same bed your daughter was born in” [For Her]. I feel like that is the ethos of the record, talking from a first-person perspective you don’t typically hear. She’s said in an interview that it was for people quarantined with their abusers. But simultaneously, it’s a joy to listen to.

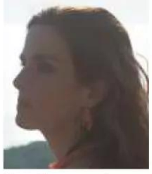
I actually avoided it for a couple of days when it came out, I didn’t know if I could deal with it. It only took me three days to get around to it, though. I laid on my bed and put it on. I don’t normally listen to music that way – I’ve always got my headphones on, staring at my phone – but I put it on and floated away on my bed.

Phoebe Bridgers: floated away with Fiona Apple.



MARIA MCKEE

Lone justice-seeker.



Since I came out I’ve become mother to a lot of young queer and trans musicians. There’s a lot of age-gap mentorship, because oftentimes families can be mercurial around queerness and we need to fill in the gaps. My favourite new singer is **Lauren Auder** who’s kind of like my spiritual daughter. She made this really beautiful EP called Two Caves In [above], and I was a fan before we met on Instagram and became friends. We have very similar influences – people like Stephen Sondheim, Scott Walker and Kate Bush. There’s a stunning self-produced video for Lauren’s song June 14th that shows her amazing theatricality and power. She’s a baby genius, basically.

My favourite American band right now is a really cinematic, post-cowpunk band called **Roselit Bone**. They’re based in Portland and before the pandemic I loved seeing their wild live shows. I suppose there are elements of The Gun Club and they’re also Lone Justice fans. Charlotte [McCaslin], the lead singer, is a real riveting frontwoman and guitarist, there’s a kind of Roy Orbison sweep to her voice. She’s been protesting up in Portland with the gas-mask and helmet on – she’s the real deal.

RON MAEL

Sparks’ moustachioed maestro.

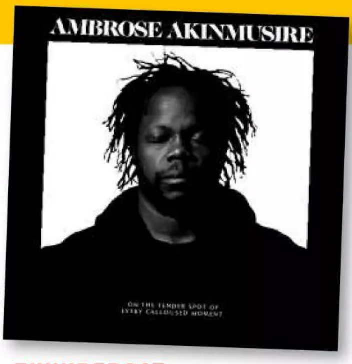
I’ve always been a fan of the **Beastie Boys**, but have not stayed with their music as much in recent years, like a lover who has grown too used to another person after time. In this Covid-19 era, however, I’m looking for two things – hugely uplifting moments and evidence that not everything about the US sucks. I stumbled on a black-and-white, 45-minute 1999 Beastie Boys concert on YouTube shot in Glasgow that checks both boxes. It’s insanely wild and great, and it’s dripping with a special American brattiness that makes me proud – at least while I’m watching the video – to be an American.

ROBIN PECKNOLD

Fleet Foxes’ chorister-in-chief.

Tim Bernardes is a Brazilian artist. His album *Recomeçar* came out in 2017 but I didn’t really get into it until January this year. Five years ago I was surfing in Nicaragua with this guy from Brazil and he said, “Oh, my friends in this band **O Terno** *love* Fleet Foxes”. He sent me the band’s album, but I didn’t hear Tim’s solo album until earlier this year. It’s really lush, baroque Brazilian folk with beautiful string arrangements. I know he’s a really big fan of Grizzly Bear and Dirty Projectors and it feels like an amazing mixture of some of those ideas with classic Brazilian songwriting, chord shapes, tunings and arrangements… It’s relaxed, cinematic and romantic – a nice world to explore – and I loved it so much I reached out to him to add some vocals to a track on *Shore*. The song is called Going-To-The-Sun Road, and he comes in at the end, singing in Portuguese.

TIM BERNARDES
RECOMEÇAR

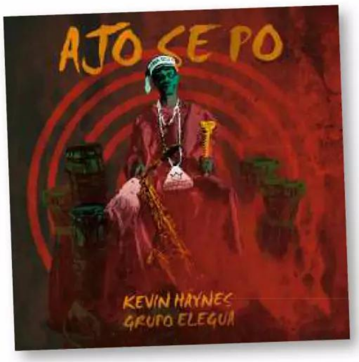


THUNDERCAT

Bass in your face.

This has been a weird time. There's been a lot of ups and downs, and this country's been in turmoil. And it doesn't lend itself to creativity. It's been a time to chill and breathe and let life in. I've been hanging out with my cat, doing a lot of kickboxing, and I became vegan. Self-care. That's what my friend Mac [Miller, who died in 2018] left with me. But the album that blew me away this year was **Ambrose Akinmusire**'s *On The Tender Spot Of Every Calloused Moment*. It's a very bold, poignant statement, very emotionally twisted, a genuine masterpiece. There are not a lot of people that can express all those wounds. Ambrose's album feels like what is happening right now. And the new **Deftones** album, *Ohms*, is really fantastic. I've been a fan for a long time. I'm proud of them for putting out an album right now, making art, and it's beautiful. And [squeaky-voiced Atlantan viral-rapper] **645AR** did this collaboration with **FKA Twigs**, Sum Bout U, and it made this year so much less worse. I almost crashed my car a couple times listening to it, I love it so much.

Thundercat: Ambrose Akinmusire found his tender spot.



PAUL WELLER

Reclaiming music hall for Mod…

My best album of 2020 was from 2008, but it was re-released [on Bandcamp] this year: *Ajo Se Po* by **Kevin Haynes** and **Grupo Elegua**. Kevin is saxophone player who lives round my way and we got chatting because we're both musicians, blah blah. It's an amazing piece of work: there's an Afro-jazz thing happening with it, lots of talking drums, and some Eastern modal things, some parts quite synchronised, other parts quite freeform, and I love the way it all ties together. Kevin also teaches African drumming and I've been very privileged to go down to his drum school and check out one of his sessions – 20 drummers going at it, with all the cross-rhythms and everything. You can hear the roots of all popular music in there.

My big rediscovery? Yeah, it was Any Umbrellas [AKA The Umbrella Man] by **Flanagan & Allen**… Seriously! Get on your Spotify for nine pound or whatever and have a listen to it. It's such a beautiful bit of music, with a lovely innocence and a great melody, like so many of the songs of the '20s and '30s.

Lucinda Williams: she got herself some Gunns.

LUCINDA WILLIAMS

Car wheels and a gravelly voice.

This year it was easy to answer this question because I found the music of **Steve Gunn**. He saw me when I played a show with Yo La Tengo in New York City over the Christmas holidays and afterwards he e-mailed to say how much he liked my set. When I got back home off the road, I listened to his album, *The Unseen In Between*. Wow! I could hear traces of Pentangle and Bert Jansch and also some Buffalo Springfield, with a little Television in there too. Who is this guy? Why haven't I heard of him? We now have several of his records and love them all. In a year when we have been homebound and the turntable spins all day long, Steve has definitely been in heavy rotation. He's brilliant. Listen to him.

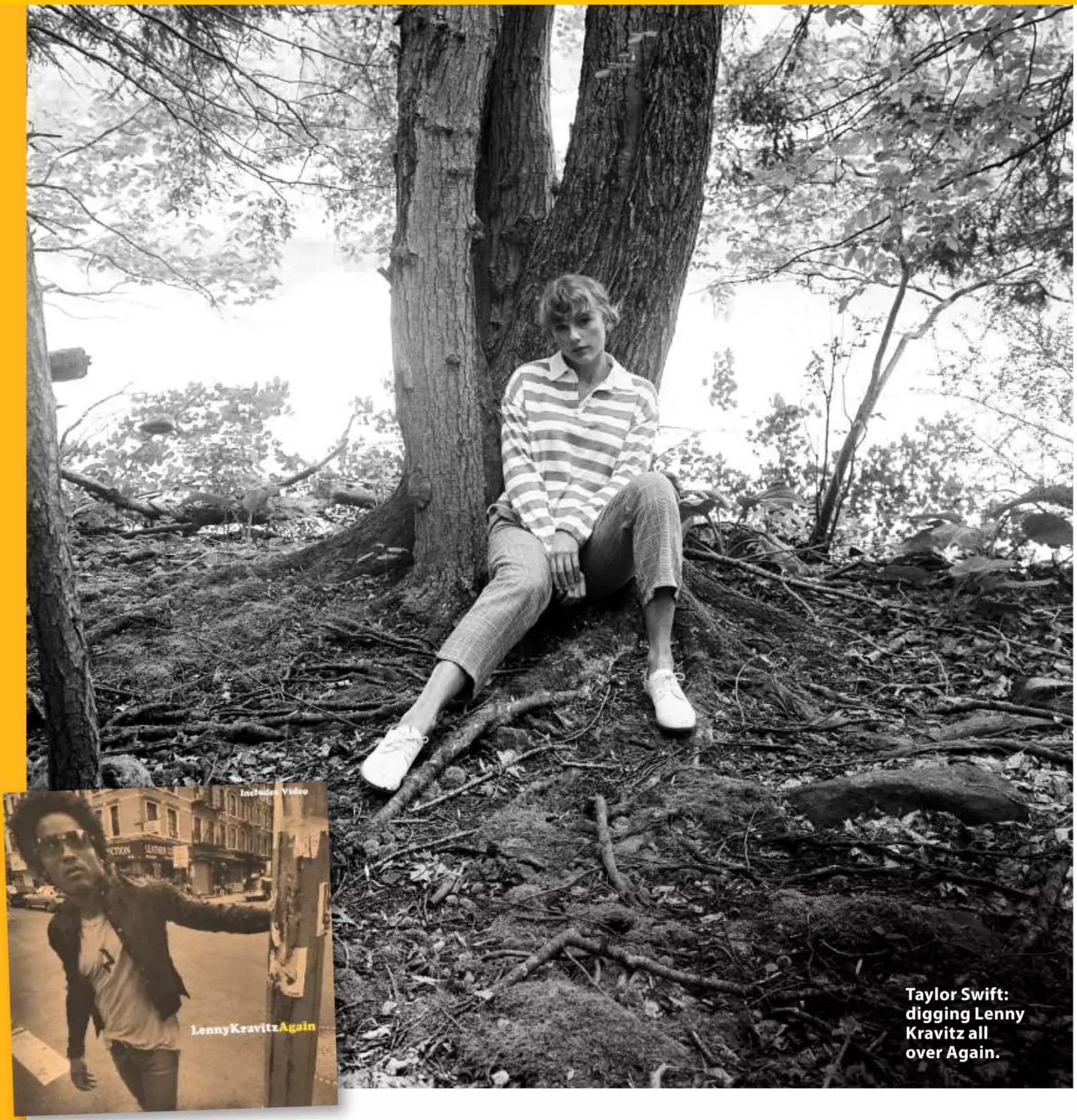
STEVE GUNN
THE UNSEEN IN BETWEEN

ROBERT LLOYD

The Nightingales' Brummagem Beefheart.

I listen to Radio 4, hardly ever have the inclination to fanny about with internet sites and the truth is I hear very little new contemporary music. But my mate **Vic Godard** advised me to download his latest single and while doing that I came across some other old favourites. **Till By Turning** are a four-piece American group, who have been around for quite some time, playing an eclectic bunch of stuff and I dig them. But it was only through my Bandcamp visit this year that I discovered Four Chambered Heart – a wonderful 40-minute piece in eight movements written by TBT member **Katherine Young**, who I think is one of the great living composers. It's the usual TBT set up of violin, viola, bassoon, and keyboards and as usual the quartet play with real panache. Movement 4 features some lovely vocals by **Emily Manzo**, and though today I particularly love Movements 7 and 8, that can change – it's all good. ➢

Danny Clinch, the1point8, Frank Ockenfels, Anna Webber, Andy Hughes, Jeff Higgot, Nicole Nodland



Taylor Swift: digging Lenny Kravitz all over Again.

BILLY BRAGG

Bignosed bard turned birdspotter.

It's *Wrackline* by a folk singer called **Fay Hield**, on Topic. I saw a video of her singing the opening song, Hare Spell, based on a spell by a woman who was tried as a witch in Scotland in the 1700s. The way Fay was performing it, there was a certain… "Yeah, I am a witch and I don't care who knows it." Really powerful. This year, I've noticed much more the turning of the seasons. Normally, seasons are all about gigging: summer festivals, autumn tours, Christmas shows. I've never really been home just watching the seasons go by, noticing that we had housemartins nesting on the back of the house, or we've seen the falcon a lot more. Fay's album plugs into that onnection between time and nature. She has a great voice for singing folk songs, she's done research into these songs, and written some of them herself. Cruel Mother might be about infanticide – it's a pretty dark record! But after I listen to it, I feel as if I've got mud on my boots. It fits into the strange times we're living in. Fay somehow managed to get into that space between the wild and the weird.

TAYLOR SWIFT

Breakout indie-folk star of 2020!

I remember first hearing Again by **Lenny Kravitz** on the radio when I was about 10, at a low volume in the car as my mom drove around to the various errands we ran. She owned the CD and it became a backdrop for school runs, grocery shopping, life in a small town. Maybe that's why, when I discovered Again again (sorry, I had to) this year, it signified both lifelong comfort and shiny new brilliance all at once. I put this song on and it feels like I'm on a plane taking off, or like I'm floating above everyone falling in love all over the world, watching it happen. This song is transportive and achingly wistful. It can be BLASTED at maximum volume or the soundtrack to my quietest moments. Solo-written and produced by Lenny Kravitz, I live in awe of this song and I'm so grateful it exists.

FAY HIELD
WRACKLINE

MAX WEINBERG

Doing the E Street Shuffle since 1974.

I typically like rock music that aims for a physical experience first of all. It must be the drummer in me!

1) **Pearl Jam**, Quick Escape. PJ always come up with new stuff that's so interesting. And Eddie Vedder is one of rock's great voices.

2) **Slipknot**, We Are Not Your Kind. Even if my son, Jay, wasn't drumming on this it hits me where I need it to. The middle drumbeat, by the way, just knocks me out. Great vocals as usual by Corey Taylor and the interweaving of the guitars are a hallmark of this band.

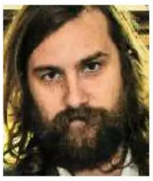
3) **The Pretty Reckless**, Death By Rock And Roll. I know what they mean! Love the vocal and the atmosphere.

4) **AC/DC**, Shot In The Dark. Reminiscent of some of their greatest hits, but who cares. A classic band and Brian Johnson is killing the vocal here. Phil Rudd's drumming is always right there.

5) **Bob Dylan**, Murder Most Foul. Dylan is the original rock alchemist. Some 60 years after his first recording, he still can knock you out.

MARK BOWEN

Idles' hardcore guitar hero: how far will *he* go?



Viviankrist's bludgeoning electronica was a source of plenty inspiration this year. Her album *Cross Modulation* and the accompanying remix album feeds many an hour of what-on-earthery. I discovered some older music that feels very new to me; **Egisto Macchi** and **Rosa Yemen** both have a disregard for convention that jars and refreshes in equal measure, like a cold shower for the ears. Also the saxophonist **Bruce Lamont**; his post-apocalyptic post-music felt apt this year, somehow. **Sinéad O'Brien**'s dark chocolate-rich imagery added escapism to proceedings. It wasn't all cerebral and esoteric. My one-year-old daughter incited an interest in the *Moana OST*, and she's a big fan of the new **Fleet Foxes** too, so that's a win.

KHRUANGBIN

Texas' twanging exoticists.

Mai Yamane's Tasogare – what a tune! We first heard this song in a vinyl bar in Tokyo while we were on tour. We'd been listening to Japanese City Pop for years without knowing the name of the genre. Once we knew, we started seeing it everywhere: the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon in full effect. There's something so precise about the funk of this music. This singer's also known for her work on the Cowboy Bebop series with **Yoko Kanno**, widely regarded as one of the best Anime scores. It's a jumping-off point to finding all sorts of treasures.

BLAKE MILLS

Singer-songwriter, producer and Dylan's new guitarist.

Mike Hadreas [Perfume Genius] first turned me on to The Healing Day by **Bill Fay** when he posted on Instagram about it. Then one night I was listening to it in the car on the way home from the studio and I just lost control, emotionally, in a way that I wasn't prepared for. I walked into the house and said to my partner, Gaby, We've got to listen to this song. We sat at the table, put it on and we both just sat there, quietly sobbing, and smiling.

You know when you listen to a song and all of a sudden it seems to resonate with the world in a new way? The way the lyric unravels line by line it keeps feeding you this narrative of hope, but you can't have a song that's that hopeful without there being an element of extreme loss. In the second stanza he sings: "When the tyrant is bound and tortured free from his pain and the lofty brought to the ground and the lowly rage/Ain't so far away/ The healing day." It could sound pretentious, but it doesn't. A lot of that has to do with the track's discipline; the

Samuel Gehrke, Jacqueline Schlossman, George Salisbury, Jacob Blickenstaff, Wolfgang Webster, Tom Ham

measured way the lines unfold and how much space there is to digest between each phrase. Also, the music is cyclical and familiar. There's not a lot of variance but there is a lot of expression. That weird tension: this is just going around and around and around, but I don't ever want it to stop.

THURSTON MOORE

The downtown sound of Stoke Newington.

The one record I felt was really genuine, and reflective of 2020, was *Apparition Paintings* by **David Toop**: you're hearing the sonics of someone's feelings and emotions and recollections, defined by this bizarre situation of being told not to socialise. I've always enjoyed David's records, but this one I find momentous. It comes out of this contemporaneous place, more so even than records dealing with this anxious energy we've been subsisting with. **Public Enemy**'s new record is exciting and strong, it's defined by feelings of heat and anger. That's a good thing. But David's record had the most thoughtful vibe to it, he's putting out sounds that come from nature, things that rub up against each other through the random moments of the day, using singers' voices as sound elements. Toop's one of the good guys. He gives equal value to Solange as he does to Steve Beresford! He has a real rock'n'roll sensibility that I don't find too readily in free improvisation and experimental music.

STEPHEN MALKMUS

Still brightening record collection corners.

There's a few things I heard this year that I really like. *Scramblers* by **Container** is minimal overdriven synths and drum machines from this American artist – intense, succinct, DGAF blasters. **Brigid Mae Power**'s album *Head Above The Water*. She has a great voice, makes cool understated videos too. It's that perfect mix of folk and rock, with nods to the greats like Sandy Denny and Anne Briggs. And Japanese composer **Hiroshi Yoshimura**'s album *Green* was recently reissued by Light In The Attic. It is pretty much the opposite vibe of Container – chill/meditative/warm synthesizer tones. Ponderous new agey stuff that goes down well with the family.

Keeping his head above water: Stephen Malkmus.

Brigid Mae Power
Head Above The Water

WAYNE COYNE

Flaming Lip sieves the corker from life's clunkers.

I'm not very good at working the Google Assistant or the Amazon Alexa thing in our house but one day I asked it to play **Simon & Garfunkel**, and it played this song I'd never heard before: "He was a most peculiar man…" I'm thinking it's one of these tangents they send you down, but sure enough it's Simon & Garfunkel, A Most Peculiar Man – this stunning song, a real Nowhere Man vibe – and it turns out that somehow I've never listened to the whole of the *Sounds Of Silence* album all the way through.

So A Most Peculiar Man took me back to *Sounds Of Silence*. And of course, most of it is stunning. The Sound Of Silence, the song, is an untouchable piece of work. But three songs in you get some clunky, bad '60s pastiche! [*Presumably, Coyne means Blessed, or Somewhere They Can't Find Me.*] How can you do something so perfect, then the next minute sound like you don't know what the fuck you're doing? But that's what music is! You don't *get* The Sound Of Silence without the clunkers. *Life* is clunker – but sometimes the reward is The Sound Of Silence.

JOHN COOPER CLARKE

Poet laureate of Beasley Street.

My daughter Stella's banged up with us at the moment, fortunately, and she introduces me to stuff – I go a lot by names, and when I heard **Working Men's Club**, I thought – great name. And then, track number three on their album is called John Cooper Clarke! Haha! It's a lot of fun, it's got my titles and lines written into it. I've got to love them, haven't I? I'm a guitar guy, but as digital stuff goes it's real good and wouldn't sound out of place on a playlist at the Haçienda. And last Saturday we watched the **Sex Pistols** live at Brixton in 2007 on the telly – it was already old news when it happened, but good God! What a reminder of what a great rock'n'roll band they were. Steve Jones, one of the top five rock'n'roll guitar players of all time, and what a great frontman Rotten was. The trouble with punk was, the ideology swamped the music, but they're part of the pantheon now. I play the **Ramones** all the time too. They were a return to core values, like reinventing The Beach Boys for an urban crowd.

MOJO HEROES: THE BEST OF 2020

On your MOJO CD this month…

1 BOB DYLAN

Crossing The Rubicon

(Bob Dylan) 2020, published by Columbia Records; http://www.columbiarecords.com/

2 FRAZEY FORD

Azad

(Ford, Parris, Power, Raham) published by Saltwater Music (SOCAN) ℗ and © 2020 Arts & Crafts Productions Inc, from the album *U Kin B The Sun* (Arts & Crafts); http://arts-crafts.ca/

3 CORNERSHOP

Highly Amplified

(Singh) published by Musics For Motion ℗ and © 2020 Ample Play, from the album *England Is A Garden* (Ample Play Records); https://www.ampleplay.co.uk

4 KHRUANGBIN

So We Won't Forget

(Ochoa, Speer, Johnson) published by Warp Publishing ℗ and © 2020 Dead Oceans, from the album *Mordechai* (Dead Oceans); https://deadoceans.com/

5 RUN THE JEWELS

Yankee And The Brave (Ep. 4)

(Jaime Meline, Michael Render, Torbitt Schwartz, Wilder Schwartz) Definitive Jux Music / Pulse Music Worldwide (SEESAC), Aniyah's Music / The Royalty Network (ASCAP), Money Makes Me Dance / Third Side Music America (ASCAP), Eussicise Entertainment / Kobalt Music Group (ASCAP) Produced by Torbitt Schwartz & Wilder Schwartz ℗ 2020 Jewel Runners LLC under exclusive license to BMG Rights Management (US) LLC Taken from the album *RTJ4* Licensed courtesy of BMG Rights Management (UK) Ltd.

6 FONTAINES D.C.

I Was Not Born

(Chatten, Deegan, O'Connell, Curley, Coll) published by Domino Publishing, originally from the album *A Hero's Death* (2020, Partisan Records); partisan records.com

7 NICK CAVE

Galleon Ship (Live at Alexandra Palace)

(Cave, Ellis) published by Kobalt Music Group Ltd, ℗ & © 2020 Bad Seed Ltd under exclusive license to AWAL Recordings Ltd, from the album *Idiot Prayer – Nick Cave Alone At Alexandra Palace*; https://www.nickcave.com

8 PHOEBE BRIDGERS

Halloween

(Bridgers, Oberst, Hutson) published by Whatever Mom Music (ASCAP), Bedrooms; Bedrooms and Spiders (BMI); Corn Fox Publishing (ASCAP), ℗ and © 2020 Dead Oceans, from the album *Punisher* (Dead Oceans); https://deadoceans.com/

9 BILL CALLAHAN

Ry Cooder

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10 MOSES SUMNEY

Virile

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MOJO
HEROES
THE BEST OF
2020

11 TOOTS AND THE MAYTALS

Got To Be Tough

(Toots & The Maytals, Frederick Toots Hibbert, Nigel Burrell, Sly Dunbar, Cyril Neville, Zak Starkey, Delroy Fatta Pottinger, David Sardy, Gavin Lurssen, SSHH, ZAK, Max Noise, Tomas Crow, Michael Rendall, Delroy Pottinger, Youth) ℗ 2020 Trojan Jamaica, Ltd under exclusive license to BMG Rights Management (US) LLC

12 JARV IS…

House Music All Night Long

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13 FLEET FOXES

Sunblind

(Robin Pecknold and Beatriz Artola) published by Robin Pecknold (Kobalt Songs Music Publishing), 2020, epitaph records http://epitaph.com/

14 TONY ALLEN & HUGH MASEKELA

Slow Bones

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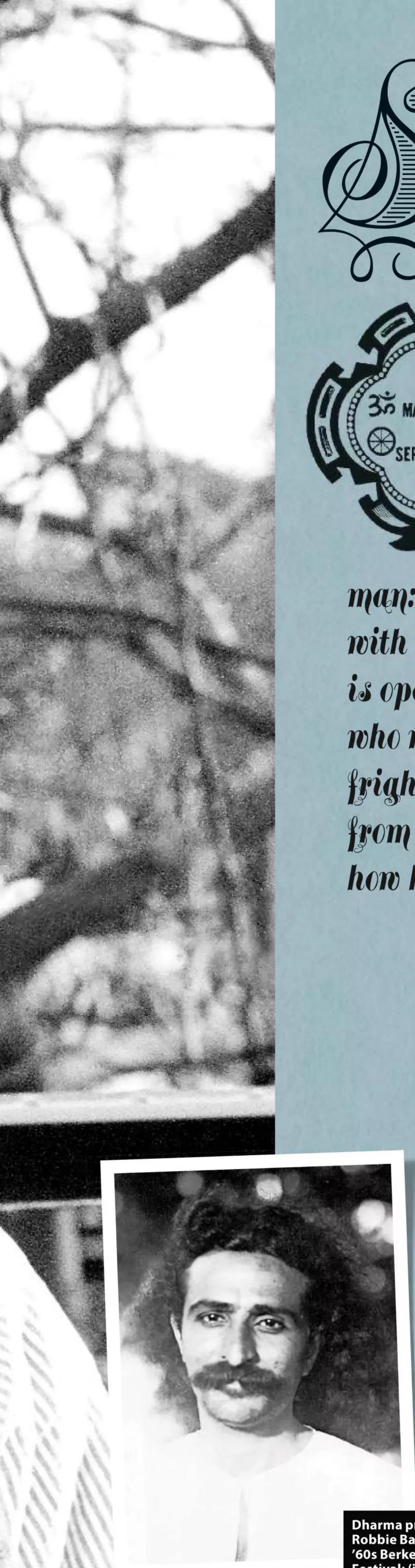
15 NUBYA GARCIA

The Message Continues

(Nubya Garcia, Joe Armon-Jones, Daniel Casimir, Sam Jones) Orchestrated by Nubya Garcia. Recorded by Giles Barrett at Soup Studio, London, Mixed by Kwes. Mastered by Paul Blakemore at CMG Mastering, Produced by Nubya Garcia. Produced by Kwes


Dharma prince: Robbie Basho at a '60s Berkeley Music Festival; (inset) Meher Baba, 1928.

Strings Of Life

MASTERY
IN
SERVITUDE

The music of Robbie Basho was like the man: fragile, mysterious, uncompromising, suffused with inner light. As a treasure chest of lost recordings is opened at last, MOJO talks to the friends and players who were amazed, confounded and – sometimes – frightened by him. "He saw himself as an ambassador from another plane," they tell Andrew Male, "and that's how he conducted himself." Portrait by Barry Oliver.

RICHARD OSBORN FIRST MET ROBBIE BASHO IN 1968. A politically active student at Stanford University eager to embrace the drug counterculture, Osborn was also deep into the improvisational folk scene coming out of the Jabberwock coffee house in Berkeley, California.

"I'd heard a couple of Robbie's albums," says Osborn, "but it wasn't 'til I saw him that…"

He pauses to reconsider what he is about to say.

"He gave a concert at Stanford University Students' Union," continues Osborn, "and his personal presence blew me away. He played some raga pieces from *The Falconer's Arm I* and I instantly knew I had to study with this guy. I called him up the next day."

By 1968, the 28-year-old Basho was already a guitarist of strange and shimmering talents, combining Eastern and Western influences into a seemingly effortless patchwork of baroque wonder. A follower of Indian spiritual teacher Meher Baba, Basho had joined one of Baba's schools, Sufism Reoriented, renouncing the drug use that had caused him great emotional and mental pain during his early twenties.

"Robbie said taking psychedelics was like throwing a hand grenade into a flower," explains Osborn. "I'd come from an alcoholic family and was deep in the midst of overdoing drugs and alcohol myself. So when he asked, 'Oh, by the way, you don't do any kind of drugs?', I just sat there watching the second hand moving on my watch. I said, No, no, I don't. All of a sudden I'd found a light. I'm no longer on a path of self-destruction. I'm following this guy who has deeply integrated his spiritual journey with his music. Robbie Basho saved my life? Yeah, I'd say that's probably true."

ROBBIE BASHO DIED ON FEBRUARY 28, 1986 ON HIS CHIROPRACTOR'S table, after a regular traction manoeuvre caused blood vessels in his neck to rupture, leading to a fatal stroke. He was 45 years old. On hearing of his death, his friend and fan, the guitarist Glenn Jones, said to himself that "in 10 years no one will even know who Robbie Basho was." ➢

Portrait by Barry Olivier, Courtesy of Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University libraries, Alamy

THE FALCONER'S ARM I
Robbie Basho
Robbie Basho Songs of the Great Mystery
Robbie Basho
The Seal of the Blue Lotus
The Grail & The Lotus
Takoma
Robbie Basho
Guitar Vol. I

≺ "In 1986, every one of his records was out of print," explains Jones. "Robbie had worked 24-7, 365 days of the year and was barely able to keep a career going. What were the chances he'd be remembered? I've never been happier to have been wrong about something."

The revival of interest in Basho and his incredible music began gradually, with the Takoma label's reissue of his records on CD in the early 2000s. More recently the industry has snowballed, and 2020 has been a busy year for Bashology, with *Songs Of The Great Mystery – The Lost Vanguard Sessions* emerging on Real Gone Music this spring and *Song Of The Avatars: The Lost Master Tapes* coming soon via Tompkins Square. But most agree the real breakthrough was Liam Barker's 2015 documentary Voice Of The Eagle: The Enigma Of Robbie Basho. Barker's confounding, affecting film – issued on DVD this year – opened doors not only to new fans but to a new understanding of the musician himself.

"Liam's documentary got to places nobody had ever been able to get to before," explains Richard Osborn. "Glenn Jones knew Sufism Reoriented had all of Robbie's belongings, including a box of master tapes. They kept that door closed firm. I was shocked when they let Liam in."

"That happened during crowdfunding for the film on Kickstarter," explains the London-based director, who originally began his Basho doc as a film school project in 2009. "A Meher Baba lover contacted me out of the blue to express his enthusiasm for the project, which led to him providing me with a long list of contacts. Fortunately, almost everyone I got in touch with was eager to be involved."

"That film changed so much for me and other people," says Osborn. "It presented a much more positive image of how Sufism Reoriented helped Robbie. It gave him a kind of protection and order to his life. I think he may have unravelled far more quickly if he hadn't been part of that world. Robbie was not too tightly bound."

BORN IN BALTIMORE IN 1940, THE CHILD WHO would become Robbie Basho was orphaned as an infant and adopted by the family of Dr Daniel Robinson, who christened him Daniel Robinson Jr. At an all-boys Catholic school in Baltimore he developed a strong religious sensibility that carried over into an interest in Zen Buddhism and Hindu music while a Pre-Med student at the University of Maryland. There, he read Japanese literature, dabbled in mystical painting and bought a 100-year-old Mexican 12-string guitar from a sailor for $200. "Robbie was worried he was overweight," his friend Max Ochs would tell Liam Barker. "Part of his motivation for practising the guitar was that it might make girls like him. He was going for whatever beauty he could find."

After discovering the music of Ravi Shankar, the young guitarist began to develop his own style of open-tuned, 12-string acoustic playing, one less about technique than emotion, something boundless and overflowing, and which he'd often perceive as bright colours and abstract shapes due to his synesthesia. Dropping out of university in 1962, he began a period of cross-country wandering and psychedelic experimentation. According to his fellow guitar visionary John Fahey, he assumed the name Basho – borrowed from 17th century Japanese poet Matsuo Bashō – "after spending a night on a mountaintop and ingesting a great deal of peyote."

Fahey and Basho mixed on the folk scene based around the Unicorn coffee house in Washington DC. When Fahey moved to Berkeley in 1963, Basho followed. "That's when he put on the trappings of the eclectic Eastern Holy Man," wrote Fahey. "White pyjamas, turbans, fruity Indian boots made of soft leather. He was drunk on the oriental. It was his play. His poetry, his costume, his persona… full of humour, laughter and a kind of mad ecstasy."

Fahey admitted to being slightly afraid of Basho ("I thought he might be a loony"). Nevertheless, it was Fahey's record label, Takoma, that released Basho's first LP, *Seal Of The Blue Lotus*, in 1965.

"In the '60s, listening to The Weavers and Joan Baez and then hearing Robbie's first album was like being blindsided," says Richard Osborn. "Suddenly here was a guy drawing on Japanese and Eastern music, referencing Buddhism and the Tibetan Book of The Dead. He saw himself as an ambassador from another plane, and that's how he conducted himself."

Basho's music on his next Takoma LP, 1966's *The Grail & The Lotus*, was an eccentric puzzle of acoustic picking – a cascading style that fed off Eastern and North African influences as well as 'Quiet Village' exotica, yet sounded like none of these things. It certainly wasn't being played on Top 40 AM radio, but by the time the Summer of Love came around, 'underground' FM stations were programming Robbie Basho alongside John Coltrane, the Grateful Dead and Eric Burdon And The Animals.

"Robbie was on the radio a *lot* back then," remembers Oakland-born experimental guitarist, Henry Kaiser. "The new freeform FM stations mixed everything up in a big bowl. I was in high school in Monterey and they'd play all that stuff next to each other. I was obsessed."

Kaiser, who also has synesthesia, heard Basho's music as abstract patterns, like graphic notation. "I was also listening to John Fahey and Sandy Bull at the time," he says, "but hearing Robbie's music was like walking through a forest or diving underwater and exploring the reefs. Always the most gloriously coloured music."

Meanwhile, Basho was adding falconry gloves to his eccentric look. As with the music, the sartorial influences were many, yet the final result was uniquely Robbie Basho. All who met him attest to a unique and powerful presence.

"I first encountered Robbie in the flesh, delivering copies of his fourth LP, *The Falconer's Arm I*, at Moe's Books in Berkeley," says Kaiser. "I've no memory of how he was dressed but he was impressive: simultaneous klutziness and authority; a wizard's wisdom and a fool's naiveté radiating from a multi-coloured aura around him."

"That was around the time of my guitar lessons with him," recalls Osborn. "He showed me stuff he was working on, pieces I wanted to learn. But we never played along together. I was really hoping we'd get into his improvisatory approach: how do you organise these musical explorations? But he never let me sail along on that journey. Didn't happen."

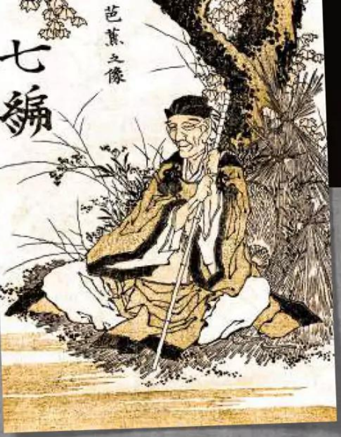
Regardless, Basho's lessons, which typically ran to two hours, had a lasting effect on Osborn. "I'd get this contact high," he says. "I'd float out of there and step back onto the streets of Berkeley and I'd be flying. No drugs. Robbie said that psychedelics open you up to stuff that you aren't prepared for karmically. It's stuff you're meant to go through, not suddenly arrive at. That made a lot of sense to me."

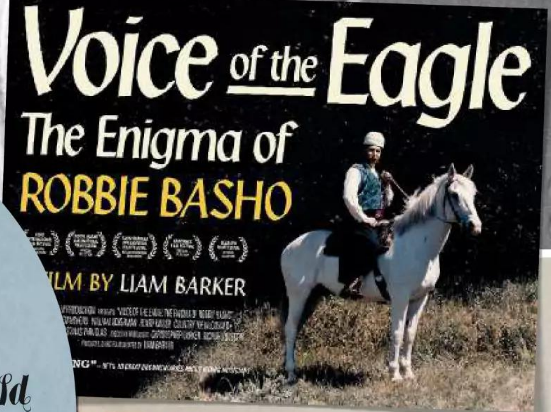
IT WAS PARTLY AS AN ATTEMPT TO MANAGE THE legacy of psychedelics, that Basho joined Sufism Reoriented. "He would be walking down the street and demons or strange clouds would follow him," says his friend and fellow guitarist Hank Mindlin. "It was as though he'd opened a gateway to another world and could not close it."

Sufism Reoriented, and the guidance of its leader, Murshida Ivy Duce, appeared to bring a new order and structure to Basho's ≻

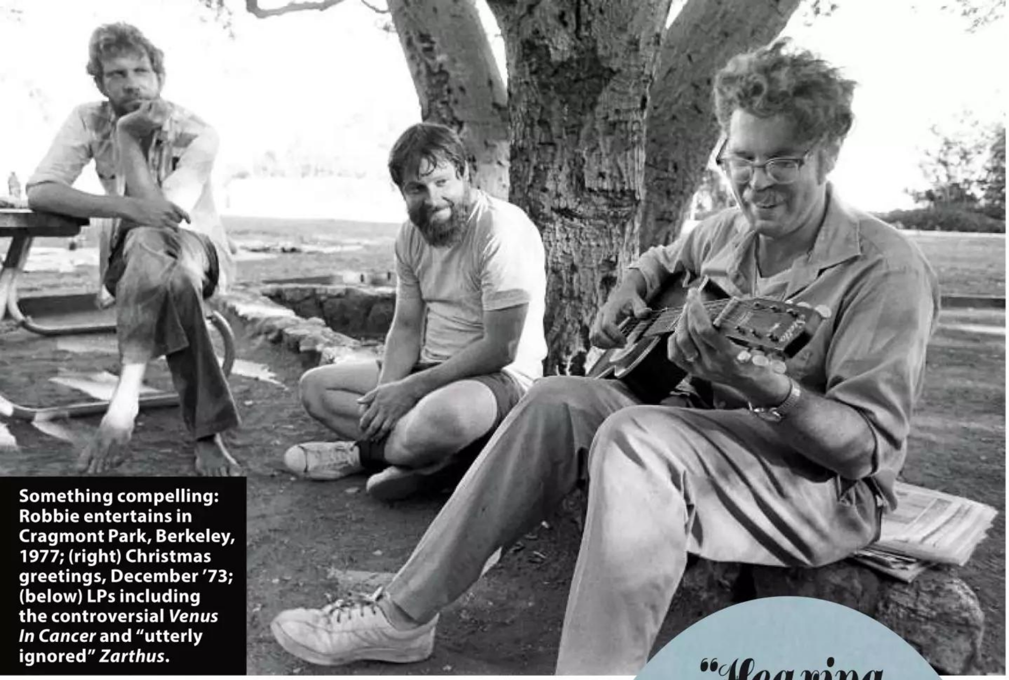
Portrait by Barry Olivier, Courtesy of Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University libraries, Alamy, Courtesy of Sufism Reoriented (2), Getty

Seeking the Grail: (clockwise from top) Basho in Berkeley, mid-to-late '60s; Matsuo Bashō, the 17th century Japanese poet whose name Robbie took; Liam Barker's 2015 breakthrough documentary; Basho at Sufism Reoriented, San Francisco, 1969; John Fahey, circa '67; Robbie again at Sufism Reoriented, San Francisco, 1972; (opposite page) Basho's albums, including this year's *Songs Of The Great Mystery* compilation.




Voice of the Eagle
The Enigma of
ROBBIE BASHO
ILM BY LIAM BARKER

> "He would be walking down the street and demons or strange clouds would follow him. It was as though he'd opened a gateway to another world."
>
> Hank Mindlin



Something compelling: Robbie entertains in Cragmont Park, Berkeley, 1977; (right) Christmas greetings, December '73; (below) LPs including the controversial *Venus In Cancer* and "utterly ignored" *Zarthus*.

Jeff Dooley

≺ life, while a new record deal with Bob Krasnow's Blue Thumb label offered a hope of financial recompense that had not come with Takoma, whose Basho releases had rarely sold more than three hundred copies.

Dedicated to "Avatar Meher Baba", the Blue Thumb LP *Venus In Cancer* ranged from delicately patterned folk ragas to intense cantor-like songs of elemental power. It should have won Basho a new audience, especially among his fellow Sufi adherents, but whoever designed the record cover had the bright idea of representing each star sign as a naked woman, one sporting crab claws instead of hands. Basho was furious and would deface copies of the album when and where he found them, covering up the women with concert flyers or pictures of Meher Baba.

Henry Kaiser caught one of the *Venus In Cancer* shows: "He had a solo concert at a tiny arts venue on San Pablo Avenue in Berkeley. Because of car trouble I was about 15 minutes late and as I drove up I noticed Basho was standing alone outside the club. Nobody else showed up."

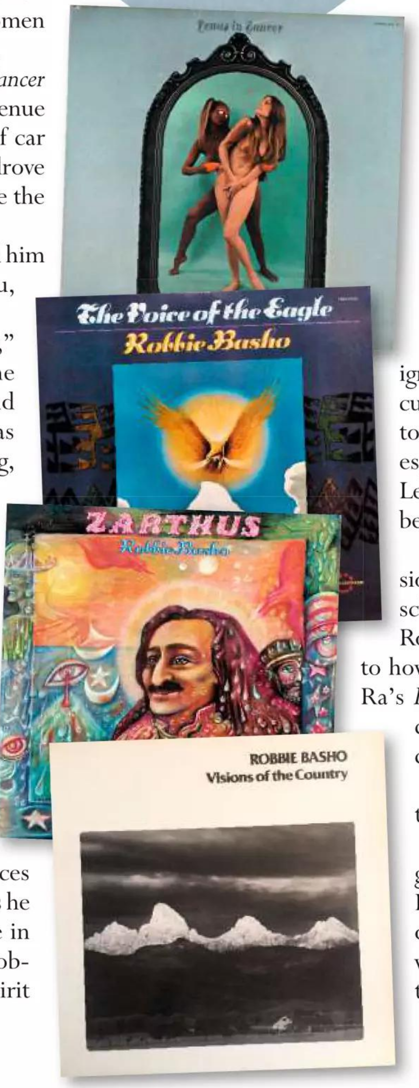
Seeing how upset Kaiser was, Basho invited him inside, saying, "I'll play three songs for you, then we can both go home."

"He sat down in front of me with his guitar," remembers Kaiser. "I was struck by how he seemed to create entire worlds of colour and sound in this small room. I realised he was spinning narratives. That his songs had pacing, punchlines. Occasionally you see it in great blues artists. He was a storyteller."

"I opened several of Robbie's concerts for him," says Richard Osborn, "and first off, he could be quite manipulative about that. He didn't have a driver's licence, so he'd call me and say, 'Can you open for this concert? And, oh, by the way, can you give me a lift?' Well, you know, I'm in Palo Alto. He's in Berkeley: it's like an hour and a half drive up there, hour and a half drive to the concert, we do the concert and I had to drive him back. My wife was not a fan."

Another aspect of Basho's live performances was an on-stage need to engage with the voices he heard in his head. "There's a touching scene in Liam's documentary," says Osborn, "where Robbie's having a conversation with this Indian spirit on-stage and his Sufi friend says, 'Robbie, stop doing this, or people will think you're crazy.' He didn't get that, and I think that's where Sufism Reoriented let him down. Murshida Ivy Duce claimed to be able to see two hundred of Robbie's previous incarnations. He believed he'd been a soldier in Genghis Khan's army. I think that kind of stuff pushed the wrong buttons. Also, the synesthesia didn't help. He was locked into it. For instance, at one of our concerts I played his Lost Lagoon Suite [from *Falconer's Arm I*] and told the audience how it evoked the deep blue-greens of the Northwestern forest, and as I'm talking, Robbie's in the wings shouting, 'No, Rick, it's not green. It's gold. It's gold!"

> "Hearing Robbie's music was like walking through a forest or diving underwater and exploring the reefs."
>
> Henry Kaiser



IN 1972 ROBBIE BASHO LANDED A deal with the pivotal jazz, folk and blues label, Vanguard. Unfortunately, neither 1972's *The Voice Of The Eagle*, nor 1974's *Zarthus* reached a broader audience. Possibly influenced by a reading of Dee Brown's history, Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee, Basho's new vocal approach attempted to recreate the singing style of the Native North American.

"There were almost no reviews of the Vanguard albums," says Glenn Jones. "They were utterly ignored and sold so poorly they were in record store cut-out bins for years. After *Zarthus*, no one wanted to touch him. It was an incredibly dispiriting period, especially as his Takoma labelmates John Fahey and Leo Kottke had signed to major labels and seemed to be going from strength to strength."

Jones, who'd discovered Basho through an obsession with Fahey's Takoma Records, was then a high-school teenager in northern New Jersey. "Hearing Robbie Basho for the first time," he says, "was similar to how I felt after first hearing *Trout Mask Replica*, Sun Ra's *Heliocentric Worlds*, and Stockhausen's *Hymnen*: confusion. I didn't understand it, but something compelling kept drawing me back."

Jones wasn't the only one who found his life transformed by Basho at that time.

"I met Robbie in 1974 when I was 16," says guitarist Michael Gulezian. "It was at a concert in Pueblo, Colorado. I first saw him from a distance, in deep prayer. He was wearing an unbuttoned long vest over a white shirt, his arms outstretched toward the sunset. I was careful not to disturb him [but] some high school friends told him he needed to hear me play guitar. So I played for him, and the next thing I knew he was gushing about me on-stage, then put me in touch with John Fahey, who signed me to Takoma. He struck me as a saintly person, extremely humble, reverent and deeply, deeply spiritual."

After the release of *Zarthus* in 1974, Basho disappeared from the commercial scene, not re-emerging until 1978's *Visions Of The Country* on the Windham Hill label. Glenn Jones, then working for an indie record distributor in Boston, reviewed *Visions*… for its mail order catalogue, only for Basho to phone him and thank him for the review. The two stayed in touch and became pen pals.

"Robbie was kind and open, but needy," says Jones. "He'd faced an uphill struggle to find an audience his whole career and many of his letters were appeals for help – to find gigs, recommend labels, buy up his out-of-print records so he could sell them at his shows. We talked frequently by telephone and one of my strongest recollections is of Robbie's heavy sighs."

Jones didn't meet Basho in person until the early '80s, on what would turn out to be Robbie's final East Coast tour.

"I met him at Boston's Logan Airport," he says, "just a year or two before he died. The 'tour' consisted of two paying gigs, one at Club Passim in Cambridge, and one at some college Robbie took the bus to. At the same time, John Fahey was touring the East Coast sometimes twice a year – his shows always sold out."

For that last tour, Basho stayed with Jones and his girlfriend Wendy. "He was polite," says Jones. "He showered regularly, he made his bed, he was well-behaved but he was needy. We took him to bookstores and to a movie. He said he was vegetarian, so Wendy took him to some of her favourite restaurants, but then he said he required a big steak dinner on the evening of his show 'for strength'."

However, all was forgotten on the night of the Club Passim gig.

"He was transfixing," says Jones. "He took you out of the world, into his world. *Some* of that comes across on record but his *presence* was very intense and affecting. He held his audience spellbound. He was so real."

After the gig, Jones dropped Basho off at Logan Airport for his flight back to California. The two shook hands, said their goodbyes, and promised to keep in touch.

"I remember we talked about the other guitarists on Windham Hill," says Jones. "Robbie felt they were trying to steal his audience. I remember him saying he had no friends. The one thing I never asked him about was Sufism. I regret that now. Maybe I could have understood Robbie better."

THOSE REGRETS STAYED WITH JONES AFTER BASHO died in 1986. Similarly, Richard Osborn continued to wrestle with his memories of Basho after they lost touch.

"I severely injured my left hand around 1980," he says. "I couldn't play the guitar for about 15 years. During that time, I looked to Robbie and I saw this incredible pathfinder [who lost his way]."

That's how the story might have stayed, for friends and fans alike, if it hadn't been for Liam Barker's documentary, especially the film-maker's encounters with members of Basho's extended family, and his friends within Sufism Reoriented.

"That film was a great comfort to me," says Osborn. "I realised how Sufism Reoriented gave Robbie a sense of community. I discovered that he had a sister who loved him. I learned he had *friends*. Robbie was a lonely guy, but I learned he wasn't alone."

The other discovery of the documentary was Basho's own archive of unreleased recordings, that had been held in the home of a member of Sufism Reoriented. It's those tapes from which Tompkins Square's *Song Of The Avatars* box draws.

"Robbie sent me many tapes over the years," says Glenn Jones, "and I was expecting some of that stuff to be on here. That it would consist almost solely of never-before-issued original compositions, experiments, improvisations… that blew me away!"

"You listen to this stuff," says Henry Kaiser, "and you realise that he was operating at the same level of quality he ever was, except he's operating with other people, collaborators, members of Sufism Reoriented. Look at the photos in the box set. He's part of a community, they're treating him seriously, and he's *happy*. He found something there that he didn't find in the rest of his life."

Magic Box

Robbie Basho's private archive surrenders its wonders. By Grayson Haver Currin.

Robbie Basho

★★★★

Song Of The Avatars: The Lost Master Tapes

(Tompkins Square CD)

ROBBIE BASHO could hardly be described as a delicate musician. A guitarist who snapped strings more than picked them and whose strums often suggested he was fanning some invisible flame, Basho treated his most famous instrument like an extension of his body's own sinew, meant to be flexed and stretched and used. That principle persisted in his piano playing, defined by tufts of emphatic notes that cohered into imposing clouds. And then there was that notoriously orotund voice, an unrestrained operatic bellow that seemed forever reaching, as if toward the heavens.

"This does not seem like the end of his enigma so much as a new beginning."

This feeling – of unapologetic conviction and endless searching, channelled into song – is clear from the first belligerently bent notes of Harakiri, Kali Style, the menacing and meandering raga that begins this five-disc, 54-track profusion. It's every bit as apparent during closer Lord Of Roses, a yearning worship song Basho and his fellow Sufism Reoriented adherents transformed into a communal trance years later. Between these bookends, Basho plays breathless games of chase with his strings (Medieval Nocturne), coaxes and commands their overtones into radiant waves (Gypsy Rosary), and intones riddles over a shimmering ostinato pounded on piano (the staggering Crazy Horse Soliloquy). Basho's best music expresses an ecstatic commitment to an evolving spiritual quest – there's a daunting, perhaps overwhelming wealth of that here.

Though *Song Of The Avatars* finally unseals Basho's long-sought archive, this does not seem like the end of his enigma so much as a new beginning. The half-dozen paeans that constitute its linernotes (from Glenn Jones, Liam Barker, and Henry Kaiser, among others) are uniformly puzzled, trying to tease out the ways this new trove intersects with the rest of Basho's catalogue. What to make of his baying version of Robert Johnson's If I Had Possession Of Judgment Day? Or his surreal ballet score, beautifully played on piano but sung in an especially stentorian tone? Still, a truth emerges: Even now, boxed into this set, Basho continues to mystify.

Robbie Basho
Song of the Avatars: The Lost Master Tapes
Robbie Basho
Song of the Avatars: The Lost Master Tapes
Robbie Basho
Song of the Avatars: The Lost Master Tapes

BLOOD & FIRE

A LIGHTNING STRIKE OF BARE-BONES PUNK AND CATCH-HELL BLUES, WITH AN IRRESISTIBLE MYTHOS THAT – ULTIMATELY – GREW TOO BIG FOR TWO YOUNG PEOPLE TO SUSTAIN: AS **THE WHITE STRIPES**' NEW BEST-OF UNDERLINES, THEY WERE THE MOST EXTRAORDINARY BAND IN A GENERATION. BUT AS THE FOLLOWING ACCOUNTS OF THEIR MAGICAL RISE, REIGN AND RENUNCIATION SET OUT IN BLACK AND WHITE, IT WAS NEARLY ALL OVER BEFORE IT EVEN BEGAN.

BROTHERS & SISTERS: **BEN BLACKWELL**, **KEITH CAMERON**, **STEVIE CHICK**, **ANDREW PERRY**, **VICTORIA SEGAL**.

PORTRAIT: **KEVIN WESTENBERG**. DIGITAL TECH: **EDWIN INGRAM**.

A family affair: Jack and Meg White photographed for MOJO in north London, May 8, 2002.

Kevin Westenberg

JUST KIDS

1997-2000

HUSBAND AND WIFE FORM ART-BLUES-PUNK DUO, THEN DIVORCE? A FOOTNOTE IN ROCK HISTORY, SURELY, AT BEST? **ANDREW PERRY** RECALLS THE RESISTIBLE RISE OF JACK AND MEG WHITE.

THE SCENE: AN UPHOLSTERY workshop in sleepy Corktown, downtown Detroit. In this square, low-ceilinged outhouse circa 1993, 17-year-old John Anthony Gillis serves an apprenticeship under Brian Muldoon, a keen punk/garage aficionado 16 years his senior. Come evening time, they'll push back all the furniture, tools and machinery, set up a drum kit for Brian, a guitar amp and mike for Jack, and blast the night away.

"Jack was always obviously a performer, and I wasn't," Muldoon told this writer in 2003, as he aired tracks from a shoebox full of CDs documenting those private jams: The Stooges' Down On The Street, Arthur Lee's Five String Serenade, a Zeppelin-heavy take on Dylan's Girl From The North Country. Already in fierce evidence: the squealing electric-guitar runs and desperate vocal quaver Jack had perfected singing along to The Beatles' version of Hippy Hippy Shake.

Born in 1975, raised Catholic in Detroit's gritty, Hispanic Southwestern quarter, Gillis had been force-fed '60s and early-'70s classic rock by his six elder brothers. On his own, he'd started exploring pre-war blues. Muldoon, meanwhile, introduced him to canonical garage-punkers The Cramps, The Gun Club and local primitivists The Gories. By the end of 1993, Jack was playing drums with theatrical cowpunks Goober And The Peas, whose frontman Dan John Miller styled himself as a surrealistic country singer. Jack soaked up all the precedents. Yet it would take something outside the orbit of his obvious talent to make his defining musical project unprecedented.

He'd first met Grosse Point native Megan Martha White in '91, at a coffee shop in middle-class Ferndale. Both were 16 and far from gregarious. They started dating, and moved together into his parents' house at 1203 Ferdinand Street in Mexicantown. Jack used the attic to rehearse in, and he later never tired of explaining how one day Meg walked in, slipped behind the drum kit and started bashing along.

"I love the blues so much," he told MOJO in 2000. "Being white and born in '70s Detroit, I didn't want to be fake about [playing it]. The simple way Meg played the drums gave me the perfect chance. It put me in a box, with all the excuses and disclaimers on the outside of the box: 'We're just kids, we don't know any better.'"

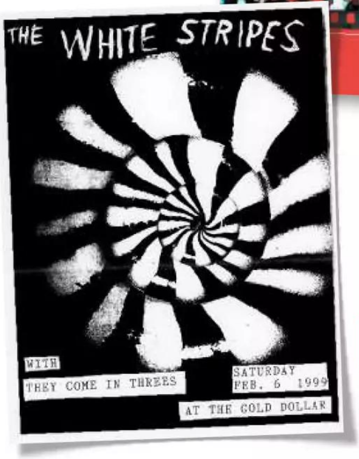
In September '96, Jack and Meg married in a small family ceremony in South Lyon, 45 minutes northwest of Detroit, but within Jack's curious construct for the band they were brother and sister before they were man and wife – just a pair of siblings goofing around. It was part of their shtick when they played their first three shows, all in the same week in July 1997 at Detroit's 100-capacity Gold Dollar, even though Meg's sister worked behind the bar, and most of the audience would've been in on the joke. "In this game," Jack would tell this writer, "if Robert Zimmerman says he's called Bob Dylan, then he's called Bob Dylan. Why even question it?"

Jack took Meg's surname and, even while making brutally basic punk-blues, dressed The White Stripes as an art concept, with a peppermint candy pattern on Meg's bass drum, and the pair of them in white (for purity and innocence) and red (anger, passion). Their first 45 for tiny Italy Records, Let's Shake Hands, invited listeners to join in their playground romp. "We were writing childish songs," Jack said. "Jimmy The Exploder was this joking story about a monkey who exploded things that weren't the colour red. Everyone I'd ever played with before was male drummers who've got the whole routine down. With Meg, it was, 'Don't even practise! This is perfect already!'"

Through 1998, they played regularly at the Gold Dollar, with Jack sporting a freaky, shaved-at-the-sides pink psychobilly haircut. After their two Italy singles were passed on to Long Gone John of Californian one-man garage operation Sympathy For The Record Industry, the duo were handed a $3,000 budget to cut an album and in January '99, *The White Stripes* was knocked out in four days flat at Jim Diamond's local Ghetto Recorders facility. The album overall favoured their tougher material, including their crunching take on Cab Calloway's version of St James Infirmary Blues and Robert Johnson's Stop Breaking Down. More sophisticated numbers already composed like The Union Forever and Dead Leaves On The Dirty Ground were put in storage, ➢

THE
WHITE
STRIPES

the WHITE STRIPES



Ewolf/Third Man Records

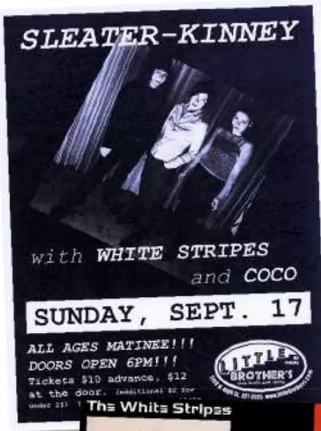
"I'D PLAYED WITH MALE DRUMMERS WHO'VE GOT THE WHOLE ROUTINE DOWN. WITH MEG, IT WAS, 'DON'T EVEN PRACTISE! THIS IS PERFECT ALREADY!'" JACK

The new style: The White Stripes in an outtake from the *De Stijl* cover shoot, Ferndale, Michigan, 2000; (opposite, from top) debut single and album sleeves; flyer from regular early Detroit gig.

◄ but both Do and Wasting My Time hinted at the more diverse songwriting moods ahead.

THE WHITE STRIPES SHOULD'VE BEEN CELEBRATING their achievement, but the months leading up to the album's unveiling weren't happy ones. After much arguing, Jack and Meg had separated. According to Chris Handyside's Detroit-insider history, Fell In Love With A Band, at the eleventh hour Jack had his wedding ring airbrushed off the album artwork.

A crisis point arrived on March 13, 1999 when The Detroit News reported that a show at Paychecks in Hamtramck would be The White Stripes' last. When Meg declined to play, a trio of Jack, his nephew Ben Blackwell on drums and Italy boss Dave Buick on bass worked up a set of covers. But, as Blackwell recalls, the world would be spared the debut of a band calling itself Brown Cardboard: "Jack calls me that afternoon, and he's like, 'Meg wants to play.' So they do the show, and everybody goes crazy, and it's the first time people sang along."



SLEATER-KINNEY

with WHITE STRIPES and COCO

SUNDAY, SEPT. 17

ALL AGES MATINEE!!!
DOORS OPEN 6PM!!!
Tickets $10 advance, $12 at the door. (additional $2 for under 21)

LITTLE BROTHER'S

The White Stripes
De Stijl

"ALMOST ALL THE SONGS I WRITE REVOLVE AROUND A STRUCTURE OF THREE. IT'S THE BEST FORMULA FOR AN ATTEMPT AT PERFECTION." JACK

The album came out in June, but they only played 18 gigs that year – slack, by later standards – and those that did go ahead were driven by an excruciating tension. Two numbers into one live recording from July '99 at Ferndale's Magic Bag, Jack 'remembers' an instance from their childhood on the mike. "[Meg] was digging a hole in the garden," he says, "and I came in from the front yard, and I caught her singing this song – 'I'm gonna kill my brother Jack/I'm gonna stab him right in the back/Put him in this hole and he'll never come back.'" There's nervous laughter from the audience, followed by a painful silence. "Do you remember that, Meg?"

Perhaps wisely, Jack was hedging his bets. He produced records, ran his own upholstery business, and had at least four other bands on the boil. In The Hentchmen and The Go he moonlighted as a lead guitarist. In Dan John Miller's 2-Star Tabernacle, he was a co-frontman, writing Now Mary and Hotel Yorba specifically for its alt-country purposes. Most auspiciously, he had a quartet usually billed as The Jack White Band, with powerpop singer-songwriter Brendan Benson on guitar. For the first time, Jack was performing a complete set of his own material, fully instrumented. "At that point," says Blackwell, "Meg didn't want to be playing shows at the clip that Jack *needed* to be playing them. He was bursting at the seams."

In this volatile period, many locals believed The Go was the band that'd fly – maybe Jack was just destined to be his generation's Jimmy Page. In The Go, though, he'd locked horns with mouthy singer Bobby Harlow, whereas with Meg he knew that, however complicated on the personal level, there would be no ego clashes or musicianly rivalry, and he'd challenge himself to the full.

So, in early 2000, even while their final divorce paperwork was coming through, he and Meg recorded *De Stijl* for peanuts at 1203 Ferdinand. While Jack's newly acquired proficiency at bottleneck guitar electrified blues numbers like Little Bird and a breathtaking version of Son House's Death Letter, there emerged unforeseen flavours like wry, Kinksian beat-pop (You're Pretty Good Looking (For A Girl)), Broadway hyper-melody (Apple Blossom) and angsty, piano-driven singer-songwriting (Truth Doesn't Make A Noise). For the Detroit scene, this disparate yet top quality record must've felt like a *London Calling*, a game-changer that struck a profound personal chord, right through to an arcane snatch of tape where toddler Jack sings I Wish I Had A Little Red Box for his mom. After its release in June, again on Sympathy, the touring picked up at last. "They do three weeks," remembers Blackwell, "and I think Meg sees the cash in her pocket, and the busy schedule ahead, and she's thinking, 'I don't need to work,' and she decides to go with it."

Dates supporting Sleater-Kinney on the East Coast saw their first exposure to national critics. At that point, the music press was pondering, at worst, Limp Bizkit, at best, Radiohead's *Kid A* – an ideal context for delivering an atavistic shock to the system. Jack baffled interviewers with Hello Operator's disavowal of mobile phones, and his predilection for the number three. "Almost all the songs I write revolve around a structure of three," he told one. "It's the best formula for an attempt at perfection. The Holy Trinity, a three-legged table, a traffic light – yes, no, maybe. There isn't just dark and light. There's always a third element."

After the agonies of the preceding year, The White Stripes saw in 2001 with a triumphant show at the Magic Stick, including a pair of AC/DC covers where the duo were fleetingly augmented by a *bassist* (named Chris McInnis). For this most ascetic of bands, whose code of self-imposed rules was soon to become world-famous, it was a rare infraction. But then, rules are meant to be broken.

"I REMEMBER THINKING, WHAT THE FUCK IS JACK DOING?"

BEN BLACKWELL, THIRD MAN'S 'VINYL DIRECTOR', ON HOW THE WHITE STRIPES FOUND THEIR GROOVE.

"PRETTY MUCH every time Jack and Meg rehearsed at the beginning, I was there, but in 1997, I was 14, 15, so I couldn't get into the early Gold Dollar shows. My first one was in Toledo, and for the first year it was hit or miss. It could be amazing, or, 'Oh man, that did *not* go well', whether it was equipment breaking, or the crowd not responding.

In May '98, just after the first single came out, they were opening at the Gold Dollar for a 'return to rock' band from San Francisco called Dura-Delinquent, and I remember thinking, Ooooh, fuuuuck! Brian Muldoon came over with his thumbs up and said, 'That was beyond rock'n'roll – it was *art* up there!' From that point on, it stops being hit or miss – it was 90 per cent hit. Jack would most likely have it together, but then it was whether Meg was going to be able to keep up – just in terms of Jack hurtling forwards, doing songs on the fly, or wanting to change things up. Then, in September 2000, just after *De Stijl*, there was this watershed moment, opening for Sleater-Kinney in a college cafeteria in Oberlin, Ohio. Before, you'd ask, Is it gonna fall apart? Are they gonna be on the same page? And after, you could literally see Jack and Meg turn into what everyone knows. Jack threw out St James Infirmary Blues, no warning, in these quarter-note accents – Bomp! Bomp! Bomp! – in an arrangement they'd never done before, even in practice, and I remember thinking, What the fuck is he doing? They probably hadn't even played the regular version for six months, but they did this bonkers, amazing version, and that was the genesis of, 'We don't ever need a setlist again! Let's just make shit up while we're up there! I'll pull some stuff out of my ass, we'll cover songs you might not even know, and just let this cliff-hanging thing propel us!' That's when they really got their sea legs."

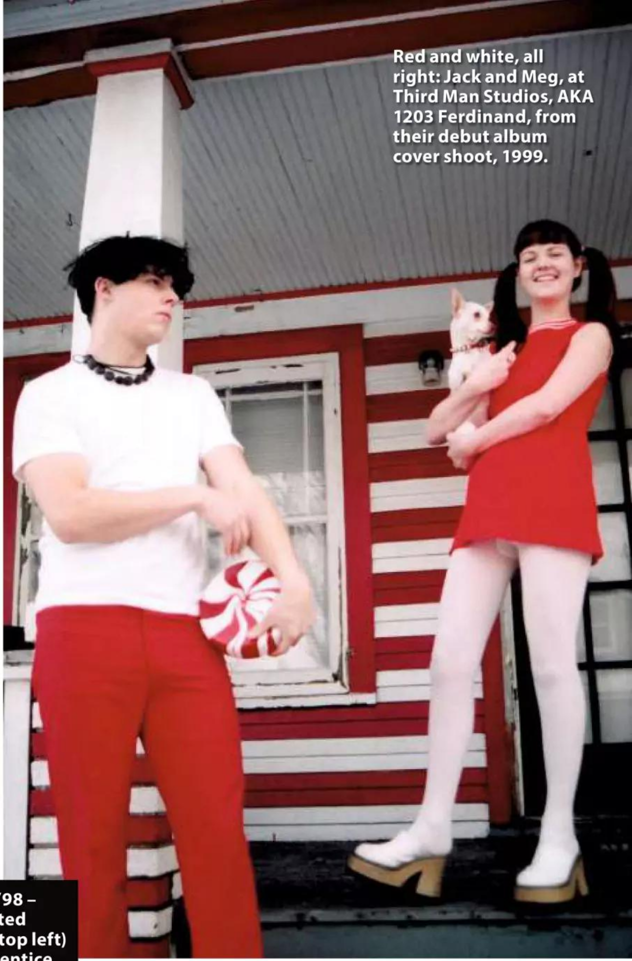
As told to Andrew Perry

"BRIAN MULDOON SAID, 'THAT WAS BEYOND ROCK'N'ROLL – IT WAS *ART* UP THERE!'" BEN BLACKWELL

Good to go: Ben Blackwell and his uncle Jack White, 1999.

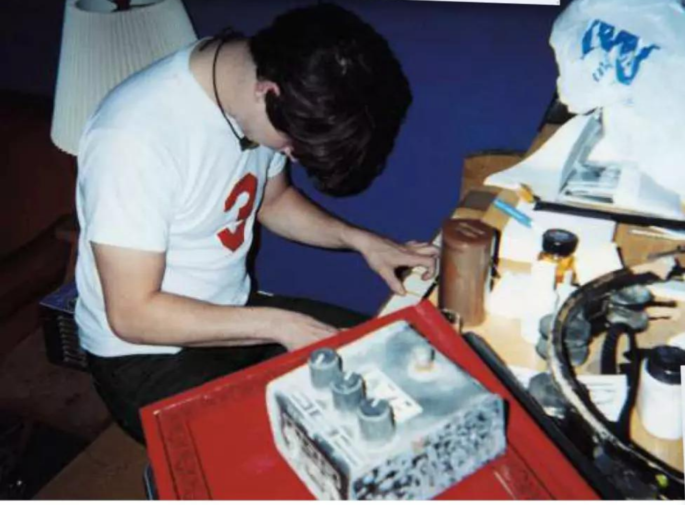
Maureen Gillis/Third Man Records, Steve Shaw/Third Man Records, Ko Melina/Third Man Records, Ben Blackwell/Third Man Records, Jack White/Third Man Records

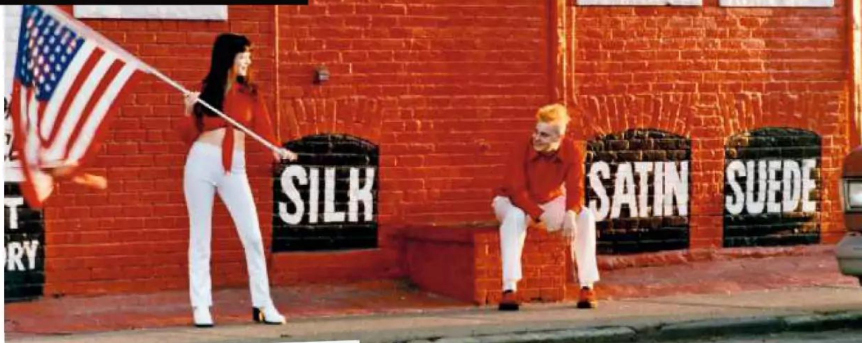
MULDOON STUDIO
DONE

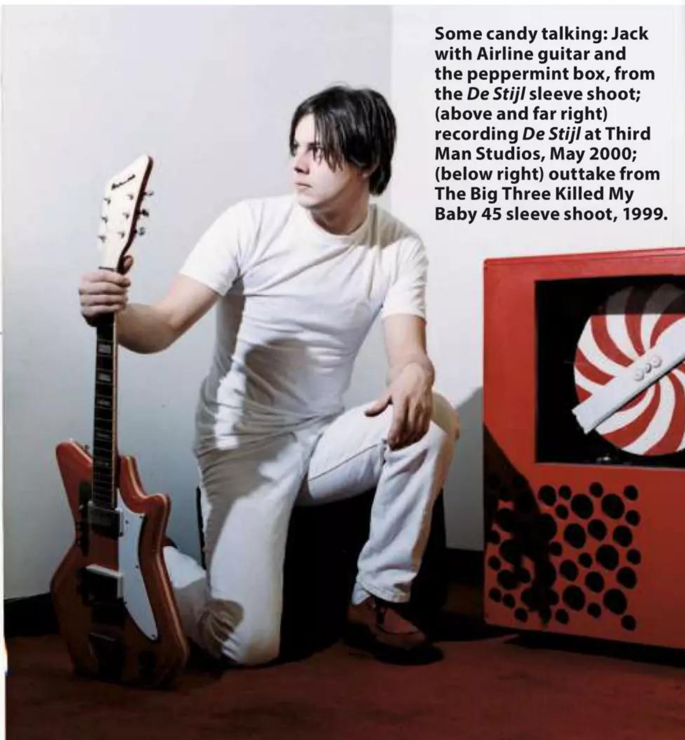


Red and white, all right: Jack and Meg, at Third Man Studios, AKA 1203 Ferdinand, from their debut album cover shoot, 1999.

Stripes and stars: (below) in '98 – 'Silk Satin Suede' was a mooted album title; (clockwise from top left) street-walkin' cheetah; apprentice upholsterer John Gillis with Brian Muldoon; Meg gives it some stick.







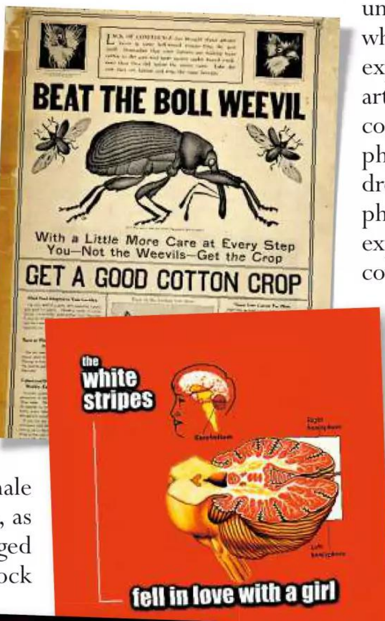
Some candy talking: Jack with Airline guitar and the peppermint box, from the *De Stijl* sleeve shoot; (above and far right) recording *De Stijl* at Third Man Studios, May 2000; (below right) outtake from The Big Three Killed My Baby 45 sleeve shoot, 1999.

DUO A-GO-GO
2001-2003

IN WHICH, SOMEHOW, THE WHITE STRIPES ARE CROWNED WORLD'S HOTTEST BAND. MORE AMAZING STILL, IT DOESN'T RUIN THEM. **KEITH CAMERON** IS STILL REELING.

ALTHOUGH A WHITE STRIPES SHOW didn't officially have a setlist, the band typically closed more than a quarter of their gigs in 2002 with the same song: Boll Weevil, a traditional blues first popularised in the 1930s by Leadbelly, about the itinerant beetle which came to the US from Mexico and ravaged the cotton industry. The song portrays the migrant bug sympathetically, repeatedly stating that whatever damage or annoyance he might cause, he's "just looking for a home".

For all that Jack White parlayed the tale as a playful Bob Dylan talkin' blues, the song's role as a finale seemed significant – increasingly so, as The White Stripes' popularity surged from underground cult through rock stardom and on to pop-cultural phenomenon. "The next verse is all about myself – ha ha!" Jack smiled to the audience at Chicago's Metro on July 12, 2002. "If anyone asks you people/Who sang you this song/Just tell them it's Jackie White/Who's done been here and gone – and he's looking for a home."


BEAT THE BOLL WEEVIL
With a Little More Care at Every Step You—Not the Weevils—Get the Crop
GET A GOOD COTTON CROP
the white stripes
fell in love with a girl

JULY 26, 2001. THE WHITE STRIPES perform in the UK for the first time, at the 100 Club in central London (technically, it's their second performance: the day before they'd played live at the BBC for a John Peel session). On August 6, they play the Boston Arms, in Tufnell Park. In the intervening 10 days, The White Stripes have become famous. Muesli bowls across middle England shake to the guitar feedback and dervish shrieking of Fell In Love With A Girl being played on BBC Radio 4's Today programme. Outside the Boston Arms, a journalist from the Sun, unable to gain entry, goes along the queue with a wad of banknotes, trying to bribe fans to write his review for him. The next day, the Daily Mirror devotes two pages to Jack and Meg White, and asks: "Is this the future of Rock'n'Roll?"

It was certainly its present. In the mainstream UK music landscape of 2001, The White Stripes looked and sounded like visitors from a recently discovered moon of Saturn – which, in contemporary rock terms, Detroit might as well have been. Until now, with two albums on a genre-specific US independent label, their orbit extended only to clued-in garage rock heads, the sort of people who'd never stopped buying vinyl during its '90s purdah, avid consumers of specialist press and radio; for whom 'success' meant the approval of John Peel, or the front cover of NME. But everything changed the moment Jack and Meg White made their first public appearance: a confluence of information spread by word-of-mouth and the still-influential physical media, turbo-charged by the music industry realising that The White Stripes could speak to an audience beyond their traditional demographic.

On-stage, Jack and Meg were a case of once seen, never forgotten, a red and white modernist blast, disrupting a post-Britpop consensus where Travis and Coldplay defined the acquiescent new normal. The just-released *White Blood Cells* would be their vehicle for infiltrating that world: its songs transcending the audacious but essentially reverential deployment of blues tropes on *The White Stripes* and *De Stijl*. Those albums had been honorific totems, dedicated to big blues men Son House and Blind Willie McTell. *White Blood Cells* was dedicated to Loretta Lynn, and looked to a broader horizon. With the third White Stripes album, Jack White fully unmasked his pop art experiment: writing songs that would play in the pop idiom, songs that other people could sing.

Inevitably, White's experiment got really interesting when it fell under greater public scrutiny, a process which itself was an integral part of the experiment, and a constant theme in his artistic quest: can innocence survive in a corrupt world? *White Blood Cells*' sleeve photographs depicted Jack and Meg, dressed in white and red, surrounded by photographers, in black. These, White explained, were "the virus". On the front cover, the pair look stern, perturbed. On the inside sleeve, they're smiling, Meg throwing a movie star shape, Jack giving it the full Macca thumbs-up. A fan of Nirvana as a teenager, he knew where satirising the commercial potential of primal rock'n'roll could lead. Two months after their UK debut, The White Stripes signed a deal with XL Records reportedly worth $1million. "We had to decide," explained Jack, "are we gonna let this destroy us or are we gonna jump in head on and manipulate it so it works for us? And not let people push us around and destroy what we've been doing. We were forced to do that."

By the time he'd uttered those words to this writer in spring 2003, the sudden mania of 2001 had normalised into a sort of routine hysteria, albeit still with great songs, sharp clothes and the weirdest on-stage chemistry since Clay and Liston or Buckingham-Nicks. Sales of *White Blood Cells* were at a million ➢

"WE HAD TO DECIDE, ARE WE GONNA LET THIS DESTROY US OR ARE WE GONNA MANIPULATE IT SO IT WORKS FOR US?" JACK

Pieter M Van Hattem/Third Man Records

The union forever: Meg and Jack, circa *White Blood Cells*, Detroit, October 2001.

Master and servant: Jack White and Iggy Pop, August 2003.

◄ and rising. Fell In Love With A Girl had been covered by English neo-soul singer Joss Stone. Jack had recently played a Confederate solider-cum-minstrel named Georgia in Anthony Minghella's Civil War movie Cold Mountain – a bit part amid a starry cast that included Renée Zellwegger, with whom he began a relationship. Meanwhile, over on the internet, a $99 Airline guitar purportedly owned and signed by Jack White had been auctioned for $1,000. In fact, White had signed just a generic detachable scratch board for a fan after a show, which was then fixed to the guitar. Henceforth, the band decreed, they would only autograph bits of paper.

Into this fervid paranoid hum, The White Stripes released *Elephant*, their greatest album. "I'm going to Wichita," sang Jack in its opening song, the now-ubiquitous Seven Nation Army. "Far from this opera forever more." At the very moment of glorious vindication, Jack White seemed to be playing his own exit music. The song's final lyric stated: "And the stains coming from my blood tell me: go back home."

But what if you can't? *Elephant* was dedicated to "the death of the sweetheart", which sounded like Whitespeak for the end of innocence. The sleeve pictured Jack and Meg in a rich red tableau surrounded by incongruous artefacts, including a human skull, Meg in a black dress and wiping a tear from her eye. Late that year, White clashed with a fellow Detroit musician, Jason Stollsteimer of The Von Bondies, at the city's Magic Stick club. He would subsequently plead guilty to assault, was fined $750 and ordered to take anger management classes. White later explained to David Fricke how The White Stripes' situation at that point equated to the paparazzi confrontation on the sleeve of *White Blood Cells*, magnified to epidemic proportions. "It became more than a neighbourhood scene problem. It became a global problem."

The band had long since scaled down their promotional schedule, as interviews typically devolved into jousts around the truth, or otherwise, of the relationship between Jack and his "big sister Meg". Maintaining that mythological façade amid intense public scrutiny must have been exhausting, though in formal situations, at least, Jack's proletarian version of *noblesse oblige* ensured that decorum was rigorously maintained. This, after all, was just another aspect of the experiment, "this box," as Jack put it, "where we created an idea of this band, The White Stripes, [and] we sort of forced ourselves to live inside of it.

"All of this," he continued, "the band, the aesthetic, the limitations, revolves around the most important thing about art, which is knowing when to stop. If you're a painter you can just keep on painting 'til you die – on the same painting if you want to. When do you decide that the painting's finished? That's the hardest part, and the most important part. It's good to feel there's an end to things."

DURING AUGUST 2003, AMID A BRIEF window in The White Stripes' Year of the Elephant, MOJO curated a summit meeting between Jack White and his hero, Iggy Pop, the Detroit rock demigod and architect of The Stooges' *Fun House*, considered by Jack to be "the greatest rock'n'roll record ever made". Jack listened in awe as Iggy reminisced about his schooling on the Chicago blues circuit, stay-overs at the MC5's Trans-Love Energies commune, and the importance of environment to art. "I could never write in a room with a nice coffee table in it," said Iggy. "It has to be kinda fucked up." Tellingly, Jack asked Iggy about making solo records (*see panel*), and insisted, possibly a little too much, that the bands from the current Detroit garage scene were still a happy family.

Six months later, on January 27 and 28, 2004, The White Stripes wrapped up 12 months of near constant touring with two nights under the ornate vaulted ceiling and chandeliers of Blackpool's Empress Ballroom. Closing out the set, inevitably, was the wanderer's lament Boll Weevil. The Elephant in the room was about to leave, his restless energy pointing him in different directions. April saw the release of a new Loretta Lynn album, produced by Jack White in Nashville. Maybe home could only ever be where the heart lay.

"IT'S NOT LIKE YOU JUST GOT *SOME DRUMMER*"

JACK WHITE & IGGY POP ON THE PROS AND CONS OF BANDS, AUGUST 2003.

JW: "When you started making solo records, did you like what was happening?"

IP: "I was miserable. Lost. Lonesome. And… nostalgic. I finally stopped with the band – I looked at what I was doing, looked at who I was, and knew I was about to go backwards if I kept trying that. David Bowie offered me the chance to make solo records, basically with him as my band. Artistically, I really like *The Idiot* and *Lust For Life* – but I was personally miserable. When I heard The Damned and the Sex Pistols, I just felt so wistful. These guys had bands, and I didn't. I felt stranded."

JW: "But why did you feel stranded, Iggy? Why did you feel stranded if they were honouring you?"

IP: "The basic formation of my life worked like this: I was a lonely kid who lived in this little trailer. My big formative experience was I got a house with these guys who were a little different, The Stooges. We all had a level of group comfort, or sloth, that comes with a bunch of guys that experience everything as one. I found a family, and I never really had that again. Also, when you put your own name out there – oooh! It's lonesome as shit!"

JW: "I remember Ringo Starr said once he felt sorry for Elvis because The Beatles at least had each other. But Elvis was all by himself."

IP: "It's really true. There's a big comfort in the gang thing. There are some downsides too. You've probably got some of that within your own band, without putting too big a point on it."

JW: "Yeah, yeah, of course."

IP: "I mean, it's not like you just got *some drummer*, you know what I'm saying?"

JW: "Hahaha!"

IP: "It's a whole particular thing. You know what I'm saying?! It's different."

JW: "Yeah… I know what you're saying."

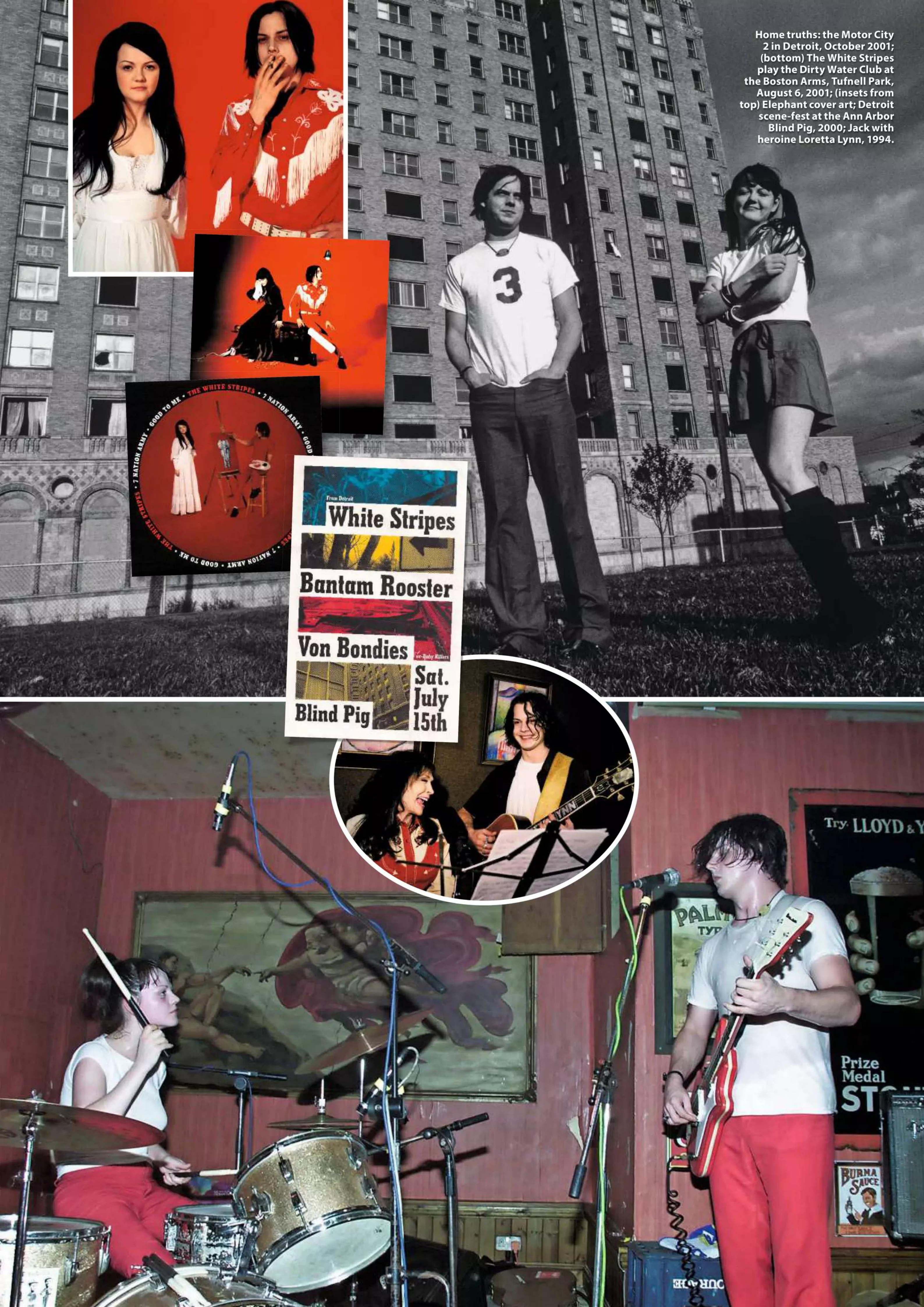
As witnessed by Keith Cameron

"RINGO STARR SAID ONCE HE FELT SORRY FOR ELVIS BECAUSE THE BEATLES AT LEAST HAD EACH OTHER." JACK

"IF YOU'RE A PAINTER YOU CAN JUST KEEP ON PAINTING 'TIL YOU DIE. WHEN DO YOU DECIDE THAT THE PAINTING'S FINISHED? THAT'S THE HARDEST PART." JACK

Mick Hutson/Getty

Pieter M Van Hattem/Third Man Records, The Sun/NI Syndication, Patrick Pantano/Third Man Records


THE WHITE STRIPES • 7 NATION ARMY • GOOD TO ME
From Detroit
White Stripes
Bantam Rooster
Von Bondies
ex-Baby Killers
Sat. July 15th
Blind Pig
Try LLOYD & Y
Prize Medal
BURNA SAUCE

Home truths: the Motor City 2 in Detroit, October 2001; (bottom) The White Stripes play the Dirty Water Club at the Boston Arms, Tufnell Park, August 6, 2001; (insets from top) Elephant cover art; Detroit scene-fest at the Ann Arbor Blind Pig, 2000; Jack with heroine Loretta Lynn, 1994.

GREAT ESCAPE

2004-2011

DAMNED TO FAME, EVICTED FROM HIS PAST, JACK WHITE IS UNMOORED… AND FINDS NEW FREEDOM IN IT. BUT WHITHER MEG? **VICTORIA SEGAL** WRITES THE FINAL (?) CHAPTER.

THE SESSIONS FOR *GET BEHIND ME SATAN* were only just beginning when The White Stripes started to suspect they were cursed. Equipment malfunctioned. Water started leaking through the ceiling. "When we were recording White Moon, Meg's rack of bells fell over," Jack White recalled. "You can hear it in the background on the album. Nothing was working, everything was broken."

Given the state of The White Stripes' world at the start of 2005, it was no wonder the band viewed these banal irritations as grand portents – a poltergeist-like projection of negative energy. Jack and Meg White weren't the first to struggle with the kind of fame that hit them after *Elephant*, yet what Jack called the "shallowness of celebrity" was only the chronic backdrop to more acute tensions. After the Stollsteimer court case, his bond to Detroit and its music scene was further dented by producer Jim Diamond's lawsuit over royalties on The White Stripes' first two albums, while in the personal shadows there was the recent end of his relationship with Renée Zellweger. In 2018, he told MOJO's Andrew Male just how far his mind spiralled downwards during that time, how he went to a "dark, dark place of not wanting to be alive any more. I couldn't go to a club any more in Detroit and see a band. I just felt like nobody wanted anything to do with me."

EVEN ALLOWING FOR THE BAND'S TRADITIONAL slipperiness, *Get Behind Me Satan* was a reckoning with that recent past, a rueful, fence-kicking survey of the storm damage across their once-inviolable little universe. "I ate what was fed me/'Til I purged every word in this song," sang Jack on the haunted White Moon, suggesting a tight connection between art and life. His unhappiness at his then-current lifestyle also coloured Take Take Take, a story about the record's guardian angel, '40s movie siren Rita Hayworth, and an admirer who just wants a word, an autograph, a picture, their demands quickly escalating. "Well, it's just not fair/I want to get a piece of hair," the fan rages, burning with entitlement while watching their idol depart. There's no doubt where Jack White's sympathies lie.

As the album emerged in June '05 to the band's first experience of mixed reviews, it wasn't hard to parse as an effort at clawing back control. In these songs unwelcome things are visited upon its 'characters' – a haunting on Little Ghost, a betrayal on Red Rain, worldly contamination on Blue Orchid. Passive Manipulation, sung by Meg (no less than three uncomfortable times during many a 2005 live show – including a baffling/exhilarating Glastonbury set that June), may have been intended as a feminist rallying call – "Women, listen to your mothers/Don't just succumb to the wishes of your brothers" – yet lands as queasy ventriloquism.

In earlier days, they played up their schoolyard charms, but this was undeniably grown-up music, illusions shattered. The Denial Twist sees deceit everywhere, White having the nerve – after all that sibling subterfuge – to sing "The truth, well you know there's no stopping it." Even the Hotel Yorba-style jauntiness of My Doorbell, anticipating a lover's arrival, can't help slanting towards paranoia: "When they gonna ring it?" frets Jack in the final lines and you wonder if he might not be hiding under the table rather than waiting by the window.

Yet as so often with The White Stripes, there was something else happening, a mirror glinting behind the smoke. "Too much opportunity kills creativity," Jack said in 2005, but *Get Behind Me Satan* was where The White Stripes' rules were loosened, Jack's guitars-drums-vocal trinity widened to include piano, marimba and mandolin. The expansion not only fits the material – The Nurse's prickling insinuations, the vintage country grandeur of I'm Lonely

Autumn De Wilde/Third Man Records,

Red all over: ***Icky Thump*****-era Jack and Meg on the couch, Nashville, 2007; (right, from top) their satanic majesty, Orpheum Theatre, Minneapolis, August 26, 2005; Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, July 14, 2007; the final performance, Late Night with Conan O'Brien, February 20, 2009.**

(But I Ain't That Lonely Yet) – but also feels like an act of defiance. It was the musical equivalent of Jack's 2005 move to Nashville – a way of opening up new space.

"Satan is the end of any unhappiness I have. Get behind me – that's it," he said. "Any troubles I have are well-represented: betrayal, loss, pain, whatever's going on in my head and life. I got the last things out on that record. I'm done." Despite the omens, the water coming in through the roof, The White Stripes still hadn't been tested to destruction. Not quite.

HIS SUDDEN MARRIAGE TO KAREN ELSON ON JUNE 1, 2005 – and the birth of their two children in 2006 and 2007 – gave Jack more reasons to be cheerful. And if The White Stripes were under increasing pressure from external forces, it wasn't obvious from 2007's sharper, saner *Icky Thump*. Recorded in the relative opulence of Nashville's Blackbird studios over almost three weeks – long for a White Stripes record – its moments of derangement stemmed more from the desire to experiment than unstoppable impulses or furious purging. Resentment rains over Effect And Cause's summertime blues but it's tempered by the album's playful scrapbook quality. There's the Creedence chug of You Don't Know What Love Is (You Just Do As You're Told); the title track's heavy state-of-the-nation address; the unhinged cover of Patti Page's Conquest, a mariachi Immigrant Song; the bagpipes of Prickly Thorn, But Sweetly Worn. There's even Meg's spoken word piece, St Andrew (This Battle Is In The Air), which seems to turn her into an unwitting ghost – more unnerving Jack casting.

Yet it's the throwaway Rag And Bone that plays like a mission statement. Jack and Meg play intrusive junk collectors, sweeping up debris, pop cultural and otherwise, listing all the places they will go to collect: "rich house, doghouse, outhouse, old folks house, house for unwed mothers…" They are scavengers, taking from the old to make something new: "We can do something with 'em," says Jack to Meg, "We'll make something out of them." (In August 2020, not unrelatedly, Jack's Third Man Records held an online "garage sale" – lots included a vintage pantyhose dispenser, a chandelier and a pair of shoes.) The idea of "saving rock'n'roll" rarely sounded so practical, the upholsterer rescuing a busted frame, covering it with new material.

There were new adventures, too. In summer 2007, they decided to play a show in every province in Canada, a journey captured in Emmett Malloy's 2009 film Under Great White Northern Lights. Alongside official dates, they played surprise shows on buses and in daycare centres, eating raw caribou with Iqaluit's elders. Yet after the frenzied motion comes the film's most famous scene: Meg sitting next to Jack on a piano stool, crying while he plays White Moon. If nobody really knows what goes on in a marriage, nobody really knows what goes on in a band, either. It seems meaningful, especially from a woman so quiet the film-makers decided (insultingly) to subtitle her few words, yet the viewer can only really guess its significance, holding it up to the light of future events. ➢

"IF SOMETHING ISN'T WORKING FOR YOU, THEN YOU HAVE TO FIGURE OUT A NEW WAY TO ATTACK IT. I THINK THAT'S WHAT MEG'S DOING." **JACK**

Bruce Bisping/Minneapolis Star Trobune/Zuma Wire/Alamy, Autumn De Wilde/Third Man Records

Dana Edelson/NBCU Photo Bank/NBC Universal via Getty

FREE CHESS CD!
JIMMY PAGE! JEFF BECK! SLASH!
18-PAGE ALL-STAR MOJO AWARDS BONANZA
MOJO
The Music Magazine
AUGUST
BRAZIL TOUR EXCLUSIVE!
THE WHITE STRIPES
CURSES! RIOTS! WEDDINGS! THE ONLY INTERVIEW!
STEREO CHESS RECORDS
CHESS CLASSICS
LSD ON KIDS' TV!?
MADNESS
THE DARK SIDE OF THE LOONS
HAIL! HAIL! BO DIDDLEY!
BY KEEF, CHUCK D, THE CORAL & MORE!
15 TRACKS HAND-PICKED BY MOJO
FEATURING: MUDDY WATERS / MARLENA SHAW / CHUCK BERRY / HOWLIN' WOLF / BO DIDDLEY / ETTA JAMES / RAMSEY LEWIS TRIO & MORE

< On July 31, 2007, the band played a show at Mississippi's Snowden Grove Amphitheater. "I think this is the last White Stripes show," Meg said to a startled Ben Blackwell, and it was. They cancelled dates, citing Meg's anxiety as the reason, yet they kept a brave face on the future. Jack invoked The Beatles to argue it was possible to exist without touring: "If something isn't working for you and it's detrimental to you, then you have to figure out a new way to attack it, a new way to look at it," he said. "I think that's what Meg's doing." Yet there was also a sense that his life outside the band was escalating: between his family, side-projects The Raconteurs and The Dead Weather, and the Nashville launch of his Third Man Records spy-lair HQ, the White Stripes microclimate seemed terminally disrupted.

THERE WAS STILL ONE SMALL YET remarkable performance left. When NBC's Late Night With Conan O'Brien ended on February 20, 2009, the host requested The White Stripes play. O'Brien worried it would never happen, even – or especially – when he caught Jack teaching Meg the guitar chords of We're Going To Be Friends 90 minutes before broadcast. An unusually unmatched pair – he wore black, she wore June Carter florals – they shared a microphone and sang about walking to school, about innocence and freedom. "And we don't notice any time pass," sang Jack, with brutal poignancy. It wasn't until 2011, though, that they formally announced their split, their final act another one of preservation, protecting what was "beautiful and special" about the band. *White Blood Cells* and *Elephant* might stand as their twin peaks, but in their final turbulent form, they discovered what else they could do, what else they were made of. The White Stripes, Jack told MOJO in 2018, "is the best thing I ever did, will ever do. It was the right thing at the right time. It just has magic dust on it." This time, at least, there was no stopping the truth. Ⓜ

"WHAT A GREAT, WILD, BEAUTIFUL DAY!"

JUNGLE JUNGLE! JACK WHITE GOES UP THE AMAZON, COMES BACK REMARRIED. **STEVIE CHICK** CAUGHT THE BOUQUET.

IT WAS SOME invitation. MOJO had been asked to accompany The White Stripes to Brazil in June 2005, playing dates to launch fifth album *Get Behind Me Satan*. Our adventure began with a press conference promoting the sold-out concert at Manaus's 19th century opera house Teatro Amazones – inspiration for Werner Herzog's movie, Fitzcarraldo – where Jack White rattled officials by suggesting the band might be loud enough to shake the plaster from its opulent ceiling. Then, a guided trip up the Amazon with the Stripes and White's new girlfriend, Mancunian model Karen Elson, whom he'd met while filming the promo for Blue Orchid only three weeks before.

Our boat travelled to the Meeting Of The Waters, where the dark-water Rio Negro and the white-water Rio Solimões run side by side, like a two-tone river. The natural beauty of the spot clearly had an effect on White, who returned early the next morning with Elson, where they were wed by a shaman priest, before receiving a blessing at nearby Catholic cathedral Igreja Matric.

"It was Meg's idea," White told MOJO. "She was the maid of honour."

"From the first time I met her, I was telling Jack, 'Marry that girl!'" added Meg. "And he did!"

Later that night, at Teatro Amazones, before 600 excitable punters – and hundreds more fans watching on hastily erected video screens outside – the ebullient groom halted I Just Don't Know What To Do With Myself to croon Neville Fleeson's 1920s ballad Apple Blossom Time to his bride up in the balcony. He then grabbed Meg's hand, dashing out to perform We're Going To Be Friends for the ticketless hordes, who stampeded the duo, quickly swamped them and invaded the opera house.

As fans tore White's religious pendants from his neck, Elson swooned to MOJO, "This is so magical – I've married such a wonderful man." White was in similarly giddy mood in the bar back at their hotel, declaring "What a great, wild, beautiful day… It started with a wedding, and ended in a riot!" And just before the newlyweds retired for the night, tour promoter Phil Rodriguez presented them with a luxurious strawberries-and-cream wedding cake. The cake soon ended up smeared across the face and chest of MOJO photographer Ewen Spencer, as Meg White kicked off an almighty food-fight – the perfectly chaotic close to an extraordinary chapter in The White Stripes' story.

"FROM THE FIRST TIME I MET HER, I WAS TELLING JACK, 'MARRY THAT GIRL!' AND HE DID!" MEG WHITE

"THE WHITE STRIPES IS THE BEST THING I EVER DID, WILL EVER DO. IT WAS THE RIGHT THING AT THE RIGHT TIME. IT JUST HAS MAGIC DUST ON IT." JACK

Just looking for a home: The White Stripes facing different ways in Iqaluit, June 27, 2007.

Third Man Records

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APES
DEUTSCHE ELEKTRONISCHE MUSIK 4
ELLA
& THE DAP-KINGS
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Condition
ON was in!"
"WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY?"
"HERE I AM BABY"
AC/DC
SIMPSON
Jane Birkin
Oh! Pardon tu dormais...

MOJO FILTER

YOUR GUIDE TO THE MONTH'S BEST MUSIC

EDITED BY **JENNY BULLEY** jenny.bulley@bauermedia.co.uk

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The generation game

With their singer silenced, drummer arrested and riffmaker deceased, AC/DC looked done for. **James McNair** hails rock's unlikeliest comeback. Illustration by **Laura Howell**.

AC/DC

★★★★

Power Up

COLUMBIA. **CD/DL/LP**

> **"It flicks a switch inside you, turning you on and reassuring you that something in this world still works a treat."**

AT THE START OF OCTOBER 2020, TWO giants passed in the night. Outgoing: Eddie Van Halen. Incoming: AC/DC, back against all odds. As Angus Young tweeted of Van Halen's prowess and sent heartfelt condolences to his family, we listened to the American, of course, but also to the new AC/DC single Shot In The Dark. Possessed of a hooky little intro and backing vocals decidedly more roustabout than Beach Boy, the DC song's adrenalised wattage felt medicinal after Van Halen passed; a fortifying dram as another strata of the hard rock canon crumbled. Someone monumental had gone; but equally, something monumentally comforting remained.

In truth, it had been a job keeping Stonehenge up (*see illustration and Back Story*). But ever since Geordie's Brian Johnson succeeded the late Bon Scott for 1980's 50-million selling *Back In Black*, AC/DC has been a vortex for obstacles, countless hurdles approached and cleared. Particularly testing, naturally, was the sad 2017 passing of tiny metronome Malcolm Young, the rhythm-guitar yardstick of AC/DC's engine room. "He was there in spirit; he was never far from my thoughts," kid brother Angus has said of Malc and the making of *Power Up*. And while Malcolm doesn't play on the album, he has a writing credit on all 12 of its songs.

Power Up's producer Brendan O'Brien also oversaw 2008's *Black Ice* and 2014's *Rock Or Bust*. Rumours of another DC album began circulating in 2018 after random fan sightings of Angus and co in Vancouver, Canada. Down at recording studio The Warehouse, O'Brien and engineer/mixer Mike Fraser were helping AC/DC finesse some unused riffs Angus and Malcolm had hatched much earlier, sifting through boxes and boxes of tapes, and building new songs around the best nuggets.

October's masterful teaser campaign saw a *Power Up* poster appear outside Ashfield Boys High School, Angus's alma mater in Sydney, then came confirmation that, together with Malcolm's 63-year-old apprentice/nephew Stevie Young, Brian Johnson, Cliff Williams and Phil Rudd were also back. Absent from 2015-16's Rock Or Bust tour having been arrested on various charges, including attempting to procure a murder (that particular charge was dropped), Rudd served eight months' home detention from July 2015, was heavily fined and sought psychiatric help for his "crazy shit". His reinstatement *chez* DC has raised eyebrows, but as a joke the errant drummer recently told Johnson underlined, the rhythmic parsimony he brings to the band is priceless:

Rudd: "You've got to watch out for those dentist drummers."

Johnson: "Dentist drummers?"

Rudd: "Yeah, they see a hole and they think they have to fill it."

The guitars are mixed especially loud on *Power Up*, but Brian Johnson's strangulated yelp can cut through any maelstrom. At 73, he brings astonishing appetite here, airing a rare falsetto note or two on Rejection, and relishing his outsider role on Wild Reputation. The latter is classic AC/DC, though built on the kind of syncopated lattice of riffage you might associate with Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood. Like the chorus guitar interplay on Witch's Spell, it flicks a switch inside you, turning you on, and reassuring you that something in this world still works a treat.

Money Shot, too, hits the spot, employing that time-served AC/DC tactic of delaying the bass guitar's entry until the first chorus. It might be a typically daft conceit riffing on porn's grand finale, but a deal of thought has gone into ensuring it reaches lift-off. It's also a reminder that, for those of us of a certain musical persuasion, there is no pick-me-up like a cranked Marshall stack.

Naturally, Angus's input is crucial. Indeed, to paraphrase John Lydon, Angus is an energy. It's as though a whole career's worth of electrical parlance – Powerage, High Voltage and the rest – has somehow been transmuted into his singular, platonically electric guitar sound. Static seems to crackle in Angus's pick slides, and sparks fly in his solos, lobbed hand-grenades which he delights in detonating. Nobody attacks a solo quite like Angus. Witness the one in Kick You When You're Down, another of *Power Up*'s stand-outs.

Even Axl Rose is politically aware now, but there's still nothing woke about AC/DC's lyrics. Trapped in a world where sex is either a serendipitous contact sport or an industrial process ("You got the right position/A heated transmission"); where women are either insatiable cougars or inherently evil *à la* Tom Jones's Daughter Of Darkness, Johnson sings of being "Caught in a witch's spell". But he also gets misty-eyed about "painted ladies looking so divine" in Through The Mists Of Time, a song that's surprisingly close to wistful, and which – almost shocking, this – briefly finds Phil Rudd playing out with 4/4 time.

Palpably game for one last, very loud hurrah – AC/DC now have an average age of 67 – there are moments here where they conjure the miraculously rejuvenated pensioners in Ron Howard's 1985 sci-fi comedy film Cocoon, even if good old rock'n'roll – not advanced alien science – is the catalyst.

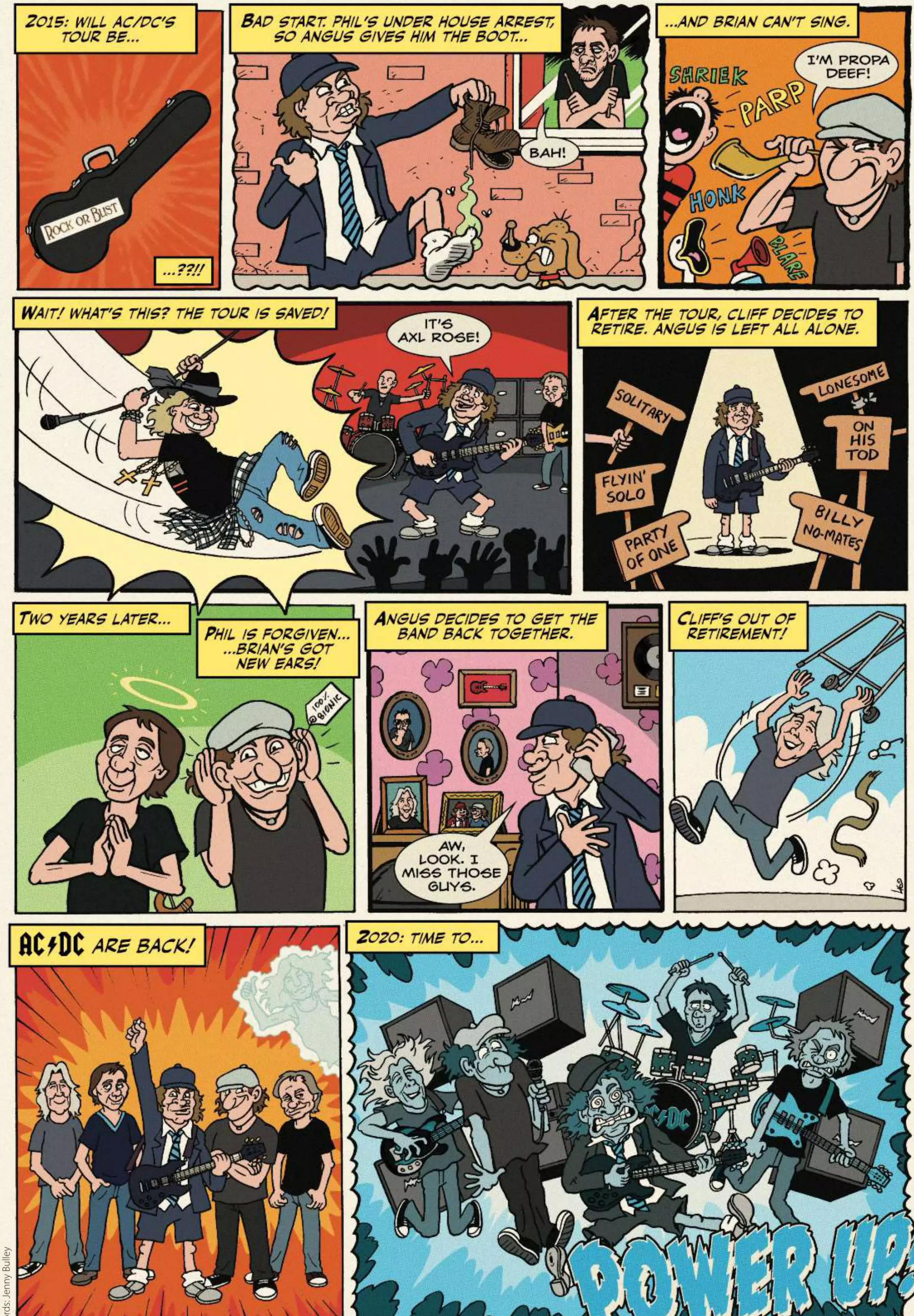
Angus has said that he and Malcolm's store of quality, unused riffs is still well-stocked, but *Power Up* must surely be the last AC/DC album, given the six-year gaps between the band's last three long-players? Hard to imagine Angus porting his schoolbag aged 71, far less Brian Johnson dangling Quasimodo-like from those stage-prop Hell Bells aged 79 – and given the current dearth of live action one can hardly envisage AC/DC making another record unless there was a hope of touring it.

When the schoolboy in Angus Young does eventually fade away, the school kid in many of us will doubtless fade a little too, but that's hopefully a long way off. *Power Up* is one mighty curtain call, and listening to it feels a bit like playtime. In a year of so many adult worries and responsibilities, thank God for that.

Getty

BACK STORY: BRIAN'S MAGIC EARS.

- **In April 2016, towards the end of AC/DC's Rock Or Bust world tour, doctors warned Brian Johnson he risked total hearing loss if he didn't retire immediately. Remarkably, the cause wasn't 36 years of Touch Too Much, but rather a punctured ear drum sustained while indulging his passion for vintage car racing *sans* earplugs. Axl Rose famously stood-in for him on the remaining dates, but Johnson's triumphant return comes thanks to hearing specialist Stephen Ambrose, whose custom-made in-ear monitors act like "a synthetic second eardrum", absorbing harmful sound pressures.**


2015: WILL AC/DC'S TOUR BE...
ROCK OR BUST
...??!!
BAD START. PHIL'S UNDER HOUSE ARREST, SO ANGUS GIVES HIM THE BOOT...
BAH!
...AND BRIAN CAN'T SING.
SHRIEK
PARP
I'M PROPA DEEF!
HONK
BLARE
WAIT! WHAT'S THIS? THE TOUR IS SAVED!
IT'S AXL ROSE!
AFTER THE TOUR, CLIFF DECIDES TO RETIRE. ANGUS IS LEFT ALL ALONE.
SOLITARY
LONESOME
ON HIS TOD
FLYIN' SOLO
PARTY OF ONE
BILLY NO-MATES
TWO YEARS LATER...
PHIL IS FORGIVEN... ...BRIAN'S GOT NEW EARS!
100% BIONIC
ANGUS DECIDES TO GET THE BAND BACK TOGETHER.
AW, LOOK. I MISS THOSE GUYS.
CLIFF'S OUT OF RETIREMENT!
AC/DC ARE BACK!
2020: TIME TO...
AC/DC
POWER UP!

Words: Jenny Bulley

Paul McCartney: when three's not a crowd.

The simple things

Made in 'rockdown', his third simultaneously slight and profound entirely solo album. By **Jim Irvin**.

Paul McCartney

★★★★

McCartney III

CAPITOL. **CD/DL/LP**

FIFTY YEARS ago, as therapy for the messy divorce of his incredible band, Paul McCartney free-associated onto a record, the bowl of cherries album, *McCartney* (as in, not Lennon/McCartney), a suite of doodles, love-tokens and tentative steps towards an uncertain future. It came as a shock to listeners used to the perfection and ambition of his Beatles stuff. Nothing rivalling She's Leaving Home, Hey Jude or the finale of *Abbey Road*. But that album effectively let him reset his terms and conditions. Subsequent listeners realised that McCartney in lightning-sketch mode could be as delightful as the master working in oils.

These anxious times have tapped another well-spring. Work on When Winter Comes, an unfinished song from the '90s, for a movie project, inspired a companion piece, the bluesy Long Tailed Winter Bird. Those two tracks provided an entrance and exit to something, with a bucolic charm reminiscent of *McCartney*, and, unexpectedly, Paul found himself fashioning a collection of songs to go between them, playing everything himself, working only with an engineer, conjuring his third, all-solo offering.

What *are* his motives after 57 years of fame? He surely has nothing left to prove. Is he simply pleasing himself? To still wish, as Springsteen portentously puts it, to "conduct the conversation" after all this time is quite something. That's addressed, in a way, on the literal centrepiece of this album, Deep Deep Feeling, a startling, eight-minute rumination on dealing with intense emotion that "burns in an ocean of love". Here is a 78-year-old guy telling us how exquisitely painful his love is. It's uncomfortably like eavesdropping. But it's also ardent, fascinating, musically astute, structurally complex and suggests one will, after listening through one's fingers for a while, grow to adore it.

What does the man who made I Wanna Hold Your Hand mean in the time of Wet Assed Pussy? I doubt that question was uppermost in his mind as he worked, but it must occur to the people who have to market it. Actually, *III*'s simplicity and unexpected stylistic leaps chime with modern taste. If anything klaxons his vintage it's Lavatory Lil, a song exactly as old-hat as you'd imagine – "You think she's being friendly, but she's looking for a Bentley" – a hackneyed conversation that didn't need conducting. It's a skipper.

The heavy-riffed Slidin' takes a decent crack at Royal Blood or Black Keys. Pretty Boys is a tuneful oddity starring a photographer. The goodtimey, piano-led Seize The Day reminded me of Hello Goodbye. Deep Down is an understated groover with an under-written "party every night" lyric that outstays its welcome. Women And Wives feels remarkably like late-period Johnny Cash. If the wobbly falsetto on Kiss Of Venus suggests McCartney's trademark acuity is no longer a given, 1994's When Winter Comes, about the routine on a farm, underlines how his voice has changed.

Just like *McCartneys I* and *II*, *III* is a confounding cocktail of genius and misfires. If it feels like Paul is oversharing, under-cooking, or this isn't what you ordered, my advice is, just give it a few years.

©Mary McCartney/MPL Communications

Dead Famous People

★★★

Harry

FIRE. **CD/DL/LP**

Thirty-one years later, finally, an album of happysad songs from a cult Kiwi band.

DEAD FAMOUS PEOPLE
"Harry"

Whatever happened to Dons Savage, erstwhile pilot of New Zealand's all-women Dead Famous People? It's a brief, scrappy saga: an EP for Flying Nun in 1986, expanded to a mini-album for Billy Bragg's Utility label after the band left Auckland for London; even Savage's guest vocal for Saint Etienne's single Kiss And Make Up (they loved her untarnished melancholic lilt) turned out to be a one-off. It seems homesickness and poverty did for the band, but Savage has a second chance now with a new set of Dead Famous People. Her songcraft – equal parts Brill Building and indie jangle – remains undimmed, while her spiky defiance has mellowed into songs of devotion (to son Harry, a departed dog, a lover), occasional lust (Groovy Girls) and philosophy (The Great Unknown). A happy new beginning, then, as Savage isn't planning to wait another three decades before recording the next follow-up.

Martin Aston

Dirty Projectors

★★★

5EPs

DOMINO. **CD/DL/LP**

This year's five extended plays, gathered together.

This year, Dirty Projectors decided to release five very different EPs, all written by leader Dave Longstreth; all five appear on the sensibly titled *5EPs*. Four of the five current members sing an EP each and on the fifth, everyone chips in vocally. Each individually sung EP highlights a different aspect of the band, before the closing Ring Road binds everything together and adds a collective swagger. Maia Friedman's Windows Open brings whimsy; Felicia Douglass's Flight Tower offers understated but hardcore electro; Longstreth's Super João (dedicated to João Gilberto) brings a cute bossa nova swing and Kristin Slipp's Earth Crisis delivers something altogether more experimental. Naturally, it's a disjointed exercise, but consumed at one sitting, *5EPs* also makes perfect sense, showcasing how each part contributes to the whole. And in No Studying, Overlord and Holy Mackerel, there are songs to rank alongside anything in the Dirty Projectors canon.

John Aizlewood

Louis Philippe & The Night Mail

★★★★

Thunderclouds

TAPETE. **CD/DL/LP**

No albums since 2007; then two in 2020 for former in-house writer at the él label.

LOUIS PHILIPPE & THE NIGHT MAIL
THUNDERCLOUDS

In the late-'80s, Louis Philippe was a mainstay of Mike Alway's pioneering él label. Since él's demise, the farmer's boy from Normandy has mostly reverted to his given name, Philippe Auclair, and enjoyed a career as a football writer, albeit not quite leaving music behind. This year saw an album with Young Marble Giants/Gist leader Stuart Moxham and now comes this rather beautiful set. It's redolent of his él work, so there is sophisticated brass on Rio Grande, a Left Bank insouciance to bouncy opener Living On Borrowed Time, and the mischief of a more whimsical Charles Trenet almost everywhere. But beneath the gloss there's an elegiac undertow; some shark-eyed, steely lyrics on Once In A Lifetime Of Lies; and, for all the elegance of its delivery, there's real anger in the Brexit parable When London Burns.

John Aizlewood

Painted Shield

★★★★

Painted Shield

LOOSEGROOVE. **DL/LP**

Pearl Jam guitarist's working from home side-project.

The members of Painted Shield are remote-working specialists. A project initiated by Pearl Jam guitarist Stone Gossard and American singer-songwriter Mason Jennings, their debut album was crafted over two years as band members fired audio files back and forth. The line-up is completed by keyboard-player Brittany Davis and drummer Matt Chamberlain, neither of whom Jennings has ever met. They make a sound that often resembles the raw desert-rock of early Queens Of The Stone Age, building intricate layers around a repetitive groove, be it the robotic glam-blues riff of Time Machine, the percussive thrum of Orphan Ghost or the snarling Breeders-style bass lick of Knife Fight. For a record made entirely separately, it manages to conjure up the glorious thrill of musicians making a racket in a room together. It's a lesson in the connective powers of music.

Niall Doherty

Jane Birkin: her story of the world.

Awakenings

Career peak for a woman forever unfairly standing in the shadows of the men she inspired. By **David Hutcheon.**

Jane Birkin

★★★★

Oh! Pardon, Tu Dormais…

WRASSE/UNIVERSAL. **CD/DL/LP**

IT HAS been 12 years since Birkin's previous album of original songs, *Enfants D'Hiver*, but this wintry collection about "loss, heartbreak, ghosts" and the death of her daughter, Kate Barry, proves she has been anything but idle. Instigated by Etienne Daho and Jean-Louis Piérot as a soundtrack to Birkin's film of the same name, it took on its own life once it became plain that Jane had issues she needed to write her way through – or as the singer herself puts it: "We drifted towards other horizons."

As ever, Birkin refuses to skirt truths: "My daughter fucked up …" is the opening line on Cigarettes, the lyric taken from her diary, and the first song written as "pressing, urgent themes" started pouring out. On the album it is preceded by Ces Murs Épais (These Thick Walls), in which Birkin recoils at the horrors of the graveyard, of what is happening six feet underground, and at the thought that she will never be able to give her daughter gifts.

For their part, Daho and Piérot provide melodies and arrangements that both Serge Gainsbourg (Birkin's partner between 1968 and 1980) and John Barry (her husband before that, Kate's father) would have been proud to pen. It's more than pastiche, however: Birkin has undeniably been defined in folklore by her lovers, but she has also gained a great deal by being immersed in our understanding of their music. If there are reminders of *Histoire De Melody Nelson* or *L'Homme À Tête De Chou* here, it's because they have been our experience of her life. The twang of a Vic Flick or Big Jim Sullivan-esque guitar (Max, based on a monologue in the film, the thought that the sole name engraved on our hearts might be that of a lover who suffered), a Herbie Flowers-like bass line (A Maré Haute), a Cold War cimbalom (Ces Murs Épais), or a choir (Pas D'Accord and Ta Sentinelle) – it's what we like her to sound like, even when she's not reinterpreting the Gainsbourg songbook.

Arguably, though, Serge barely exists on *Oh! Pardon, Tu Dormais*, with Birkin writing in French and English, allowing the listener to decide to whom she is singing. On Catch Me If You Can, the album's closing track, she finds herself alone in Brittany, close to the spot where her father, a secret agent during the Second World War, lay in wait for the delivery of downed Allied air crew who had been rescued by the Resistance. Like her daughter Kate, she starts to fall…and gets obsessed with this descent. "Catch me if you can, my love, I'm almost gone from view," she sings. One can only hope not, for she has made the album of her life.

Jane Birkin

Resurrection men: Drive-By Truckers (from left) Matt Patton, Brad Morgan, Jay Gonzalez, Patterson Hood, Mike Cooley.

Good morning Amerikkka

Restless Alabama rockers fire off second distress flare of 2020. By **Keith Cameron**.

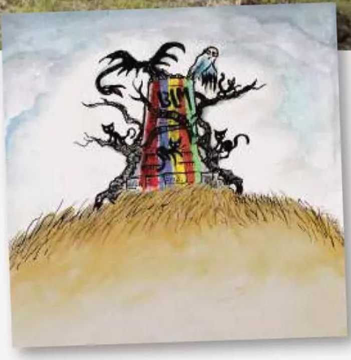
Drive-By Truckers

★★★★

The New OK

ATO. CD/DL/LP

CONFINEMENT TO barracks as the USA burned has been tough for Drive-By Truckers. After 2016's *American Band* angrily anticipated the coronation of Donald Trump, they welcomed re-election year with *The Unraveling*, a set of bitter country-soul laments upon the awful repercussions of the previous vote. Ten months later, *The New OK* arrives with the upside-down world fearfully contemplating a possible second term. DBT don't exactly seem optimistic: "Go ahead and holler for help," Patterson Hood sings on Watching The Orange Clouds, written shortly after George Floyd's murder. "No one is going to save you."



Perversely, however, *The New OK* is more hopeful beacon than funeral pyre. It mostly comprises songs recorded in Memphis for *The Unraveling* but which fell outside that album's conceptual mainframe of enraged words and brooding melodies. Hence two contrasting horn-augmented gems: hymnal soliloquy Tough To Let Go, and the languid soul groover Sea Island Lonely, a frazzled Hood dispatch from his post-midnight hour, pre-dawn airport taxi ride, thoughts stuck between the previous evening's beer and "the darkness of my songs". Masters at bottling the bittersweet ennui of the road, the Truckers channel their profession's heroic qualities on The Distance, a crunge of big riffs, banjo and John Bonham, where Hood equates their mission with America's pioneers. "Travelled all across this land in our Econoline van/And did our best to stand beside them."

Some of these vignettes could have sweetened *The Unraveling* without diluting its medicine. Sung by Mike Cooley, Sarah's Flame is a droll Muscle Shoals piano vamp noting how right-wing Republican Sarah Palin never gets due "credit" for stirring the white swamp in her 2008 VP campaign: "All fat Donnie had to do was wear the pants." The previous album's title track belatedly appears, a doo wop inferno sung beyond Hood's range by bassist Matt Patton. *The New OK*'s title song, meanwhile, is a 2020 Hood composition rife with the disharmony of now ("Goons with guns coming out to play"), recalling the wired mid-'80s R.E.M. – another Southern rock band that held their nation's moral conscience to account.

On polemic criteria alone, *The New OK* is a triumph. Wes Freed's sleeve art depicts gothic crows and cats on a tombstone daubed with rainbow stripes and "BLM". It names names ("Fascism's knocking and Trump says 'Let them in'," notes militant choogle The Perilous Night, a new mix of 2017's standalone single) then laughs in the enemy's face, closing on a roughneck slam through the Ramones' The KKK Took My Baby Away. Whichever way the political winds blow, Drive-By Truckers are holding firm to their righteous path.

Ane Brun

★★★

How Beauty Holds The Hand Of Sorrow

BALLOON RANGER. CD/DL/LP

Norwegian singer-songwriter's second long-player of 2020.

After The Great Storm was Ane Brun's first original material since 2015. Making up for lost time, she's now releasing a second record barely a month later, like a slow-release double album. Out on its own, *How Beauty Holds The Hand Of Sorrow* feels more fragile than its companion, Brun's looping voice wrapping around these songs of grief and endurance, making sure they keep their shape. Kate Bush's Moments Of Pleasure casts a long shadow over Lose My Way, a collaboration with A Winged Victory Of The Sullen's Dustin O'Halloran, while flooding strings and stained-glass vocals elevate Last Breath and Song For Thrill And Tom. It occasionally drifts away but with a subtle pillowy beat (the homeopathic Portishead of Gentle Wind Of Gratitude) or piano (Don't Run And Hide), Brun holds it together beautifully.

Victoria Segal

Deep Sea Diver

★★★★

Impossible Weight

HIGH BEAM. CD/LP

Third album from Beck's former guitarist's band.

A live guitarist for Beck and Conor Oberst and a former permanent Shin, Jessica Dobson has led Deep Sea Diver for over a decade, alongside her drummer husband, Peter Mansen. After two patchy albums, they've found their feet. Dobson's vocals are as ethereal as Jesca Hoop's – and on People Come People Go, almost Björk-like – but she's buoyed by overpowering keyboards which wouldn't have sounded out of place on a Nice album and she's unafraid of aspiring to anthemic. This enticing marriage of the out-there and the unashamedly conventional reaches its zenith on the all-guns-blazing Switchblade and the title track, where Sharon Van Etten offers a soaring Pierces-like vocal turn. It works less well on the stripped down closer, Run Away With Me, a song in desperate need of a band, but Dobson is overflowing with ideas, most of them inspired.

John Aizlewood

OSees

★★★

Panther Rotate

CASTLE FACE. CD/DL/LP

Prolific psych-rockers remix and rewire themselves.

In whichever guise he's operating, be it Thee Oh Sees, OCS or the OSees handle he adopts here, John Dwyer's music can rarely be described as straightforward. It makes the fact that the word "experiment" features in seven of *Panther Rotate*'s nine song titles feel a little like a warning. A companion piece to September's *Protean Threat*, it turns the thrashy psych-rock of its sister album inside out. Warped beats power the slow-motion funk of Terminal Experiment, Poem 2 With Horns is a soporific drone that sounds like it's been recorded through a microphone two fields away, and If I Had An Experiment is a hypnotic, loose-limbed groove. *Panther Rotate* feels like music that's been pulled apart and put back together again so many times no one can remember where everything is supposed to go. It makes for some oddly sublime listening.

Niall Doherty

Babeheaven: Nancy Andersen wakes up.

Joyce Ng

Babeheaven

★★★★

Home For Now

AWAL. CD/DL

West Londoners' opening set of late-night tales.

Much like The xx or Mica Levi collaborator Tirzah, west London's Babeheaven operate in a place where melancholic bedroom pop is enveloped in a murk of crepuscular atmospherics. A partnership centred around vocalist Nancy Andersen and producer/multi-instrumentalist Jamie Travis (son of Rough Trade founder Geoff), the pair's debut creates an invitingly somnambulant soundworld. Andersen's gentle melodies drift through a backdrop of skittering electronics, sub-aquatic guitar arpeggios and shuffling breakbeats (Human Nature is a dead ringer for '90s trip-hoppers Sneaker Pimps – surely not a name dropped with much frequency in contemporary new band circles?). What largely makes *Home For Now* land an emotional punch, though, is its warmth. The open-hearted softness of Andersen's delivery and lyrics, plus the constant inventiveness with which Travis shines a light into the dark, rouses songs from their sleepy-headed fug.

Chris Catchpole

The Bats

★★★★

Foothills

FLYING NUN. CD/DL/LP

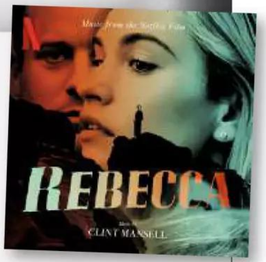
Tenth album from NZ indie stalwarts, same as the first.

The term unassuming could have been coined for The Bats, who remain resolutely unchanged in style and personnel since the early-'80s days of the fabled 'Dunedin sound'. Under boss Bat (and The Clean bassist) Robert Scott they are gently chaotic, the simple songs ending exactly when they have nothing more to add, rather than hanging around for another chorus, the only nod towards rockism being the delicately fuzzed feedback of reluctant guitar hero Kaye Woodward. Recorded in splendid isolation where New Zealand's snowcapped alps meet the expansive Canterbury Plains, their surroundings' emptiness seeps into these songs, giving them a reflective stillness that even Scott's mournful voice has seldom achieved. With Paul Kean's popping bass driving the melodies, songs such as first single Another Door – featuring a signature winding outro from Woodward – are as distinctively fabulous as anything they have released in nearly 40 years.

Andy Fyfe

SOUNDTRACKS

BY ANDREW MALE



Clint Mansell

★★★

Rebecca (Music From The Netflix Film)

LAKESHORE/INVADA. DL/LP

Romantic dread and subtle corruption from the Midlands-born soundtrack maestro.

BEN WHEATLEY'S new version of Daphne du Maurier's 1938 psychological romance arrived on Netflix on October 21, just after this column to press. Famously directed by Alfred Hitchcock in 1940, with Laurence Olivier and Joan Fontaine in the starring roles, Rebecca is a tale of romance, madness, paranoia, depicting something rotten at the heart of the English leisured classes. Listening to Mansell's score, you initially hear little of that madness. The soundtrack is built around a central, simple, romantic piano theme; repetitive, light. But like a dying flower or a bowl of rotting fruit, that central motif is gradually corrupted by Mansell, strings and electronics adding layers of dread and decay. Early reviews of Wheatley's film have focused on its glossy look, saying it lacks the gothic shadows of the original. But they're there in Mansell's score, gradually engulfing the light, and corrupting the romance.

ALSO RELEASED

Graham Reynolds

★★★

The Lodger

FIRE. CD/DL/LP

For the third in the label's excellent series of reimagined soundtracks, the US director Richard Linklater's composer-collaborator has given Alfred Hitchcock's 1927 expressionist horror a semi-industrial score. Reynolds moves from the furtive to the hysterical, creating a nightmarish *ballet mécanique* that recognises a somnambulistic choreography in Hitchcock's silent masterpiece.

Acanthus

★★★★

Le Frisson Des Vampires

FINDERS KEEPERS. CD/DL/LP

There is a school of thought that holds all '70s horror soundtracks should include scratchy guitars, clanging bells, flute solos, jazz breakbeats, male choirs and dubbed dialogue about crucifixes and bloody carnage. Available for the first time, this score for Jean Rollin's ultra-saucy 1971 vampire flick has all that and is the height of groovy, demonic cool.

Clark

★★★★

Daniel Isn't Real

DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON. DL/LP

For Adam Egypt Mortimer's 2019 horror about the havoc wrought by an imaginary friend, Brighton-based Warp recording artist (Chris) Clark has crafted something schizophrenic, where sweeping strings are blindsided by churning electronics and violins are plucked with nerve-shredding intensity. It also features Thom Yorke's remix of Isolation Theme, reworked to encapsulate 2020's mood of solitary disconnect.

Mort Garson

★★★

Didn't You Hear?

SACRED BONES. DL/LP

Part of a recent batch of welcome reissues of rare LPs by the Canadian electronics composer, this score for Skip Sherwood's 1970 acid-soaked coming-of-age campus-drama showcases how the Moog synth soundtracked the extremes of the LSD trip, from nursery-rhyme naïveté to chattering discordant nightmare. *AM*

Chubby And The Gang

★★★★

Speed Kills

PARTISAN. CD/DL/LP

Sparky-led west London hardcore troop, actually Kool.

Alumnus of a little-heralded New Wave Of British Hardcore, eponymous Charlie 'Chubby' Manning, electrician by trade, has landed on his feet in this latest super-rowdy combo, who've already made inroads Stateside. The domestic market is now scrambling to catch up, with 'trending' Partisan (Idles, Fontaines D.C.) rushing through this first full UK release for their explosive 26-minute debut. True to its title, *Speed Kills* doles out 12 largely warp-velocity songs in a Motörhead-meets-Minor Threat delirium – the title track even summons welcome reimaginings of Lemmy's WW2 bomber tilting its wings for a climactic Overkill, complete with exhilarating stop-starts. Other Gang flavours nod to Steve Jones's wall-of-guitar riffing (Hold Your Breath), and Cockney Rejects' hooligan ruckus (All Along The Uxbridge Road). Manning himself draws on a capital-based psychogeography ranging from Tottenham (Bruce Grove Bullies) to North Kensington (Grenfell Forever). At each stop on the tube map, much yobbo-chorus fun ensues.

Andrew Perry

Kacy & Clayton And Marlon Williams

★★★★

Plastic Bouquet

NEW WEST. CD/DL/LP

Canadian cousins team up with Kiwi country star.

Living hemispheres apart is no barrier to collaboration, thanks to today's social media. When Aldous Harding's former beau Marlon Williams stumbled across the first album by Saskatchewan cousins Kacy Anderson and Clayton Linthicum, he reached out through Instagram only to discover the fan-love was mutual. Months later, Williams flew to Canada and in two pre-Covid weeks *Plastic Bouquets* was largely finished. The pairing works even better than it looks on paper. Both acts keep country tradition close to their hearts, and Anderson's crystal-clear voice wraps itself around Williams' Roy Orbison croon like a modern Gram and Emmylou. Linthicum's guitar adds texture and twang, as the interplay between the trio delivers their *Plastic Bouquet* close to country perfection.

Andy Fyfe

King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard

★★★★

KG

FLIGHTLESS. CD/DL/LP

Restless Antipodean psychonauts find further inspiration in the notes between the notes.

Begun before lockdown and completed remotely, this sixteenth studio bulletin from the Gizz-verse pulls back from the thrash-metal mêlée of last year's *Infest The Rats' Nest* to further explore the Turkish psychedelia-influences they referenced on 2017's *Flying Microtonal Banana*. This microtonal mode is clearly fertile ground for King Gizzard. But *KG* is no mere retread of the earlier album, Stu Mackenzie's custom-built electric bağlama leading him in unexpected directions, like the frenetic psych-funk of Ontology, the hypnotic acoustic raga Honey, and the delirious and erotic moves of Oddfield, which channels the questing, mystic vibe of late-period Zeppelin. The closing infernal heaviosity of The Hungry Wolf Of Fate, meanwhile, imagines a Bedouin spin on Sabbath, and as such, is a triumph.

Stevie Chick

Lambchop

★★★★

Trip

CITY SLANG. CD/DL/LP

Democracy in action with Kurt Wagner's Nashville voyagers.

Look for Kurt Wagner on social media and you will find the handle "Lambchop Is A Band" – a mission statement that clearly blazes out from this collection of covers. Each band member chose a song – bassist Matt Swanson bringing in The Mirrors' Shirley, for example, garage punk with a cosmic coda – and then steered the subsequent studio session: the results are an impressively cohesive testament to Lambchop's interpretative skills as much as their experimental slant. There's an extended exhale through Wilco's already strung-out Reservations, and a sleep-paralysed version of Stevie Wonder's Golden Lady, while Wagner's own selection, an unreleased song by Yo La Tengo's James McNew called Weather Blues, consolidates the mood of thwarted yearning and suppressed urgency. Lambchop is a band, and still, what a band.

Victoria Segal

Smashing Pumpkins

★★★

CYR

SUMERIAN. CD/DL/LP

Three-quarters of original line-up go '80s synth-rock!

Back in February, Billy Corgan dismissed 2018's *Shiny And Oh So Bright Vol. 1*, his first reunion record with guitarist James Iha and drummer Jimmy Chamberlin, as "just aping what we're known for". Its successor, he said, was them "back in the lane of taking a risk". Did a recent arena cover of Stairway To Heaven hint towards unparalleled prog monstrosities to come? In fact, *CYR* packs in no less than 20 songs, all around four minutes long, clad in lavish synths, synthesized drums, expensive-sounding backing vocals and discreetly muted guitars, whose collective melodrama and hauteur recall '80s giants like New Order, The Cure and Talk Talk. The title track could soundtrack a Miami Vice speedboat chase – 'new' for Pumpkins, but also strenuously *au courant*. Corgan's floatier tunes and chocolate-box lyrics actually suit this sound palette well (see Confessions Of A Dopamine Addict), but, as so often in pop – and Corgan's – history, a 10-track single LP would've nailed it better.

Andrew Perry

The War On Drugs

★★★★

Live Drugs

SUPER HIGH QUALITY. CD/DL/LP

The exploration of their shows meets the intricacy of their LPs on a first live set.

At least the criticisms against The War On Drugs are consistent¬ – they're a glorified bar band, conjuring The Boss in the beer lights with enough post-grad panache to make listeners nearing middle-age believe they're evolving. Fine, but the band's first live album, compiled and mixed from years of tape by founder Adam Granduciel and stage manager Dominic East, offers a winning and sophisticated rebuttal. It's clear throughout these 10 tracks – a breathless Buenos Aires Beach or horizon-wide Under The Pressure – that their classic rock-indebted anthems are only what emerge from teeming soundscapes of synths, pianos, rhythms, and horns. That core, cloaked beneath the surface, dazzles. Live albums often give you the gist of the jam, inviting you to imagine studio details; The War on Drugs invert that expectation, letting the rest sparkle beneath stage lights.

Grayson Haver Currin

Sturgill Simpson

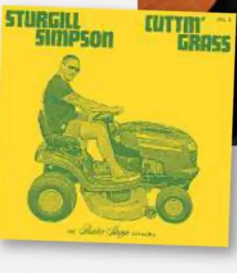
★★★★

Cuttin' Grass Vol 1 – The Butcher Shoppe Sessions

HIGH TOP MOUNTAIN. CD/DL/LP

Country star trawls his catalogue for bluegrass "mix tape".

Sturgill Simpson (centre) and mowers: good songs prevail.



RECOVERING from Covid earlier this year, Kentuckian Sturgill Simpson suggested to fans that if enough of them asked he'd release an album for them. They voted "yes" in droves, so alongside bluegrass players he describes as "next-level freak show [musicians]" he retooled 20 tracks from his back catalogue. Including three songs from former band Sunday Valley's impossible-to-find EP, it's a bottled-lightning tour through his career. The Sunday Valley songs survive the transition best, particularly All The Pretty Colours, but the psychonaut jibber-jabber from 2014's *Metamodern Sounds In Country Music* album come a strong second, and Turtles All The Way Down must be the first ever mention of space travelling psychedelic DMT in trad bluegrass. If the theory holds that a good song can be adapted to any genre and still be good, then Sturgill Simpson writes truly great songs.

Andy Fyfe

Hjalte Ross

★★★★

Waves Of Haste

WOULDN'T WASTE. CD/DL/LP

Emotive Dane makes a move for the world's stages on second album.

Like its 2018 predecessor *Embody*, the Danish singer-songwriter Hjalte Ross's moody second album is engineered by British legend John Wood (Nick Drake, Fairport Convention, Nico), who travelled to the northern tip of Jutland for the recording. Newly on board is Kevin Morby producer Daniel Goodwin, who takes mixing duties. The Gene Clark vibe of before is absent, but there're still hints of John Martyn especially on the glistening Holidays. *Waves Of Haste* aptly rolls from the speakers like undulating waves. At the mid-point, the sparse, piano-bedded ballad How Am I Supposed To Feel posits emotional fragmentation, but elegiac strings bring light. Next, the brass-infused Thinking About You has a War On Drugs insistence. Then, reflection comes with the title track, as Ross's fractured intonation weaves through impressionistic finger-picked guitar, cello and piano. In Hjalte Ross, Denmark has a formidable export.

Kieron Tyler

Jennifer Castle

★★★

Monarch Season

PARADISE OF BACHELORS. CD/DL/LP

Sixth album from Canadian psych-folk-inspired singer-songwriter.

Jennifer Castle's musical world is one of sustained, reverberating sound. Here, pianos, guitars and harmonicas tremble diaphanously on the air, and so does her voice, flittering somewhere between the shadows of Linda Perhacs, Josephine Foster and Neil Young. Named after the common but beautiful orange-and-black butterfly, Castle's sixth album was recorded at home at Port Stanley, Ontario, crickets chirping eerily in the background. Within this mix, her tales of nature and love often end up sounding supernatural, her lyrics adding to the mix by painting intense images. NYC moves from a story of lost love in the city to one where rainbows touch down after storms. In Moonbeam Or Ray, we see her shining on the lake, worried about her light breaking. The overall effect is usually on the right side of too much, the listener lifted up by Castle's wings.

Jude Rogers

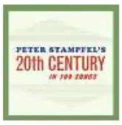
Peter Stampfel

★★★★

Peter Stampfel's 20th Century

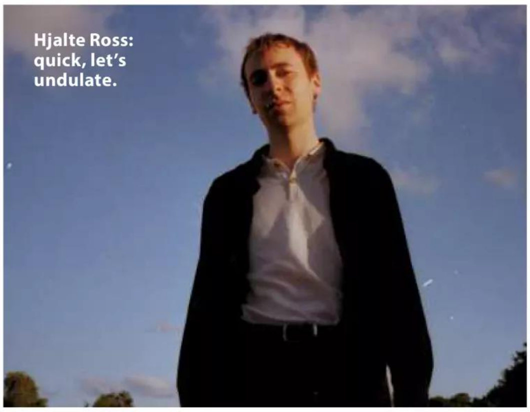
LOUISIANA RED HOT. CD/DL

A music legend plays 100 years of legendary music.



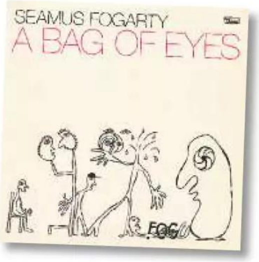
Holy Modal Rounders founder, freak-folk father and octogenarian singer/fiddler/banjoist, Peter Stampfel is revered by everyone from Dylan on down for being outrageously original, deconstructing what we now call Americana via his own fractured imagination. In this 5-CD set he sings one song from every year of the 20th century, accompanied by eclectic pickers from New York and New Orleans. Parlour songs, Tin Pan Alley, show tunes, hillbilly, rock'n'roll and MTV favourites are all rendered in Stampfel's exuberant cartoon voice. The contour of American and British musical history becomes audible, with the prevailing power and beautiful simplicity of a melody the constant factor. From I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles to Tubthumping, these 100 mostly popular gems are like loving friends all gathered together in a much-needed feel-good collection.

Michael Simmons



Hjalte Ross: quick, let's undulate.

Jonas Bang, Shervin Lainez



Seamus Fogarty

★★★★

A Bag Of Eyes

DOMINO. CD/DL/LP

Third compelling instalment of alt-folk stories-in-song.

Seamus Fogarty's songs are sparse affairs with banjo, guitars, cellos and electronics framing pithy, observational lyrics. He introduces the lone, apparently aimless traveller on Bus Shelter Blues and the protagonist of San Francisco seems similarly dislocated, wandering around the streets to a gently pulsing synth soundtrack. Nuns recalls a ubiquitous presence in his County Mayo childhood ("Nuns down the chipper/A nun behind the bar") and Ghosts blurs memory and fantasy. Jimmy Stewart is a nimble full band number with Fogarty placing himself in a Rear Window scenario, scrutinising his neighbours and musing on their covert activities, reminiscent of Tom Waits' What's He Building? There's poignancy too, particularly in My Boy Willie, a traditional Irish ballad about a sailor drowned at sea.

Mike Barnes

Sam Gendel

★★★

DRM

NONESUCH. CD/DL/LP

Amniotic glitch-funk from LA's saxman to the stars

Odd record, this one. Californian Sam Gendel has become a covertly ubiquitous figure these past few years, lending saxophone to albums by Ry Cooder, Blake Mills, Vampire Weekend and Moses Sumney, among many. March's *Satin Doll*, though, radically rethought jazz standards with nerdy electronic trim, and this swift follow-up suggests elusive quirkiness is Gendel's solo mode. There's no sax on *DRM*, consisting as it does mostly of farting old synths, a sputtery drum machine and Gendel mumbling, self-consciously, to himself. The whimsy is ostentatious, but there's something insidious about the likes of Times Like This, D'Angelo-style bedroom funk reconfigured in a flotation tank. Listen out for the cover of Lil Nas X's Old Town Road, an art gag effectively redefining what a Tik Tok novelty hit could sound like.

John Mulvey

FOLK

BY COLIN IRWIN

Suzzy Roche & Lucy Wainwright Roche

★★★★

I Can Still Hear You

STORYSOUND. CD/DL

Thoughts and fears of a family in lockdown.

THIS FEELS like finding a mum and daughter clinging together in a dark closet, hiding from an imploding world, singing in whispered tones of carnage, fear and hope in a state of almost childlike confusion. Whether a response to Trump's America, the death of both Suzzy's mother and sister, or the pandemic during which it was mostly recorded, it chimes with the times in bleakly potent manner. There's an enticing backstory to the whole Roche/Wainwright dynasty, of course – and Suzzy and Lucy have both done many wondrous things in different family liaisons and beyond – but their third duo collaboration is thoughtful, understated, affecting and quietly profound. Indigo Girls Emily Saliers and Amy Ray feature respectively on the contemplative I Think I Am A Soul and the traditional Factory Girl, while Jane offers a hushed homage to its late composer Maggie Roche. Late night therapy for the downhearted.

ALSO RELEASED

Kris Drever

★★★★

Where The World Is Thin

REVEAL. CD/DL

An outstanding guitarist, assured singer and an inspirational songwriter and arranger of unerring vision and subtlety, Kris Drever's talents reach far beyond his celebrated role as a third of Lau. Keynote track Scapa Flow 1919 tells in haunting detail of a horrendous episode when Germans sank their own naval fleet off Orkney, and his sparse take on the familiar Westlin' Winds is glorious, while even with his more inward looking material, Drever's instinct for a killer chorus is unmatched.

Shooglenifty

★★★★

Acid Croft Vol 9

SHOOGLE. CD/DL

Some assumed the death in 2016 of their brilliant and charismatic fiddle player Angus Grant spelt curtains for the ever-inventive band of musical explorers. But drafting in fiddler/singer Eilidh Shaw is a masterstroke and this first album without Grant has a zest and zeal that lives up to their reputation as modernisers of traditional Scottish music via their own genre, 'acid croft'. There's even a typically impudent Grant tune, Silence Of The Trams underlining that normal service is resumed .

Diana Jones

★★★

Song To A Refugee

PROPER. CD/DL

The mourning glory of Jones's voice is an enduring weapon to any lyric addressing tales of the downtrodden and dispossessed and with the singer recovering from illness herself, this is a particularly powerful statement of humanitarian values. Richard Thompson, Steve Earle and Peggy Seeger guest on the anthemic We Believe You, while David Mansfield's production is tastefully downbeat. Its heart is in Tennessee but its messages are universal.

John & James Carty

★★★★

The Wavy Bow Collection

RACKET. CD/DL

Enough of pandemic doom and gloom, what better antidote than an epic collection of Irish tunes played to the highest order by two brilliant fiddlers? Father and son John and James Carty draw a mighty cup from the Irish canon from the 17th century of O'Carolan to James Morrison, Michael Gorman and beyond, into mazurkas and polkas. John also contributes some divine banjo and Mike McGoldrick is among the supporting cast as jigs and reels roll into a tonic for the soul. *CI*

Soul queen Sharon Jones: got it covered.

Sharon Jones & The Dap-Kings

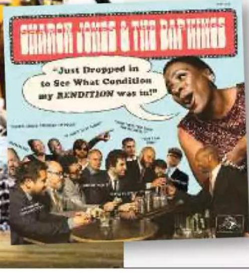
★★★★

Just Dropped In To See What Condition My Rendition Was In

DAPTONE. CD/DL/LP

Posthumous release for the Dap Queen's coveted cover versions.

AS WELL AS her own songs, co-written with the Daptone team, the late Sharon Jones covered many songs by others, be it on-stage or for various projects. *Just Dropped In…* presents 13 of the best. Ranging from solid Motown (Stevie Wonder's Signed, Sealed, Delivered, I'm Yours; Smokey Robinson's Here I Am Baby) and Minneapolis (Prince's Take Me With U; Jam & Lewis's Janet Jackson vehicle What Have You Done For Me Lately) to funked folk (Pete Seeger's This Land Is Your Land) and gentle groover (Shuggie Otis's Inspiration Information), the result delivers delightful Dapness. Jones's version of Van McCoy's Giving Up tugs at the emotions, though it's not as wrenching as Gladys Knight & The Pips' original – the simpler '60s connections of Fontella Bass's Rescue Me and Dusty Springfield hit Little By Little are a better fit. By contrast, the '78 disco of Musique's In The Bush offers the lead voice nothing.



Geoff Brown

Primitive Ignorant

★★★★

Sikh Punk

SOMETHING IN CONSTRUCTION. CD/DL/LP

Autobiographical solo debut from former '80s Matchbox… bassist hops genres.

With The Clash's hyper-eclectic epic *Sandinista!* as his guiding light, and enabled by a crew of guest vocalists, former '80s Matchbox B-Line Disaster bassist Sym Gharial's debut album as Primitive Ignorant navigates waters far from his old band's psychotic punk rock. *Sikh Punk*'s spree of hedonistic electro (Dress Like Me), brash Nine Inch Nails-like techno-rock (Ballad Of Markland Estate) and juddering future-pop (Worship Art) spins a loose autobiographical narrative, drawing upon Gharial's own sense of displacement as a young Sikh growing up in England, as he experiences racist violence and considers bleaching his skin to fit in, before finding absolution in the music scene and almost losing his soul to chemical excess. A gripping exercise in underground pop that remains punk to its soul, *Sikh Punk* also finds space for Joe Talbot of Idles and The Clash's Mick Jones to recite some Oscar Wilde.

Stevie Chick

David Boulter

★★★★

Yarmouth

CLAY PIPE MUSIC. DL/LP/MC

Beautifully bucolic debut from Tindersticks' co-founder and composer.

Tindersticks have been making their dimly-lit, cinematic music for nearly 30 years, but jazz and folk-tinged children's TV and film themes still haunt co-founder David Boulter. Inspired by childhood summer holidays on the Norfolk/Suffolk borders, *Yarmouth* is Boulter's debut release on Clay Pipe Music, the independent label known for its atmospheric, psychogeographic instrumentals. The instrumentation is fittingly vintage and nostalgic throughout: vibraphones, flutes and a '70s Lowrey organ painting vivid, often eerie aural postcards of the past. Song titles like Knickerbocker Glory and Sandcastles conceal arrangements that marry cosiness and unease, helped along by recordings of rain, seagulls and thunder. Other tracks are incredibly moving, like Seesaw, which marries a synthesized chorus of voices against a descending bass line, willing you into its current, carrying you away.

Jude Rogers

John Fogerty

★★★★

Fogerty's Factory

BMG. CD/DL/LP

Fogerty and family are having a grand old time during lockdown.

On his 75th birthday in May, John Fogerty digitally released a seven-song EP of Credence Clearwater Revival covers – its title's a nod to his former band's 50-year-old *Cosmo's Factory* – recorded live in his home studio with a band comprising his three youngest children, Tyler, Shane and Kelsey. Videos of the jam sessions went up weekly on YouTube. Now with five added covers – including Steve Goodman's classic country train song City Of New Orleans and Bill Withers' soul hit Lean On Me, two of many highlights – it gets a physical release. There's not a bad song here but, more to the point, Fogerty Sr's voice and guitar sound as potent and commanding as ever. More so at times with the sparse arrangements (Fortunate Son; Bad Moon Rising; a fine, midtempo, gospel-bluesy Long As I Can See The Light). And you don't need to see the videos to hear that they're having fun.

Sylvie Simmons

Katy J Pearson

★★★★

Return

HEAVENLY. CD/DL/LP

Sunset-warm Americana from a Bristolian singer-songwriter.

There's something effortless about this debut from Bristol's Katy J Pearson, which breezes from one perfectly constructed number to the next; each sashaying acoustic strum, stomp-along and soaring chorus leaping straight into the next. Pearson and her band's on-stage fondness for cowboy attire signposts their love for music that's rooted south of the Mason-Dixon line, but a reference to the "king of the rodeo" on Take Back The Radio's pulsating cosmic Americana aside, *Return* is light on country twang. Instead, it blends shades of folk rock, '70s MOR and Tijuana brass to create a sunset-warm backdrop for Pearson's strident, transatlantic warble. A long-player that, essentially, sets out its stall then delivers 10 variations thereof, but with not a single ounce of fat on the bone, *Return* is a road trip well worth taking.

Chris Catchpole

Pink Siifu & Fly Anakin

★★★

FlySiifu's

LEX. CD/DL/LP

Contrasting underground US rappers unite to open fictional record store.

On the face of it, Pink Siifu and Fly Anakin are chalk and cheese. While the Baltimore-based Siifu kicked off 2020 with *NEGRO*, a hardcore punk and free jazz collision that directed its galvanising rage at the police, Anakin, softly-spoken mastermind behind Virginia rap collective Mutant Academy, was warmly reflecting on life and love on *At The End Of The Day*. Yet their contrasting flows clip together surprisingly well on mellow, jazz-enriched head-nodders like Suitcase Special, Richard Pryor and Mind Right – a symbiotic hook-up with cosmic R&B risk-taker Liv.E. Interweaving skits cast the pair as laissez-faire proprietors of Fly-Siifu's record store, with increasingly exasperated messages spilling in. They respond in kind, amping-up their lyrical game as aggrieved customers revolt, peaking over Madlib's phased psychedelia on Time Up.

Andy Cowan

Steve Arrington

★★★

Down To The Lowest Terms: The Soul Sessions

STONES THROW. CD/DL/LP

Unsung funk hero in strong voice, backed by a huddle of next-gen producers.

Ohio native Steve Arrington started playing drums with Slave in the 1970s. He stepped up to the microphone in the '80s, his gilded lungs guiding a string of hits gleefully pillaged by G-funkers when Arrington upped sticks to become a minister. Hastened back by Dâm-Funk for 2009's *Higher*, the staunch vocal minimalist has much more stylistic rope to play with here, letting his distinct larynx swerve dramatically over Mndsgn's gleeful keys on The Joys Of Love and Jerry Paper's vintage organ-driven Good Mood. Better still is his low-register twang on Jamma D's slow-cooked Soulful I Need That In My Life and screaming passion throughout Knxwledge's artfully scuffed Make Ya Say Yie. A rare sustained tension between sex and spirituality bristles throughout.

Andy Cowan

Christopher Garcia Valle

Dukes Of Chutney

★★★★

Hazel

BEATS IN SPACE/RVNG INTL. DL/LP

Yes, terrible band name. But, can we move on? Enigmatic trio's full-length debut.

Comprised of California film-maker and surfer Dustin Lynn, producer and fellow surfer John Paul Jones (not *that* one) and vocalist Petra (AKA Berlin-based vocal performance artist, Elle P), this enigmatic trio have spent seven years recording the follow-up to 2013's woozy, amorphous Domino EP. That's seven slow years of globetrotting, wave-catching, and gradually assembling the gear (suitcase organ, Arp synth, melodica) and the vibe that informs this utterly blissful blend of Free Design-esque vocals, slow bossa rhythms, and lazily diffuse West Coast atmospherics. At times, there is a stoned early '90s vibe, The Orb remixing Saint Etienne, say, but without the dated beats. Mostly, however, the mood is both dreamlike and wistful, a ghostly Balearic drift, the soothing sounds you might hear drifting through the ruins of Pacha Ibiza on a warm summer's night, sometime in the far future.

Andrew Male

Surprise Chef

★★★★

Daylight Savings

MR. BONGO. CD/DL/LP

Aussie instrumentalists come back for seconds.

In a jasmine-cloaked house in the suburbs of Melbourne, Surprise Chef, a quartet augmented by three percussionists and an engineer, got together this time last year, in the early Australian summer. There, they cooked up cooling, jasmine-scented, time-warped instrumentals – slightly chilly funk and incidental music to some misremembered movie – employing dashes of cop-show Moog and cartoonish Farfisa, splashes of vibraphone and clean-limbed guitar, lightly sprinkled with congas. Throw out tantalising aromas of David Axelrod's Song Of Innocence *sans* strings (New Ferrari), Bowie's *Station To Station* (Leave It, Don't Take It), Khruangbin-style economy (The Limp), or a lost weekend spent with Isaac Hayes and Mike Post (Washing Day, College Welcomes Carl), all served up in their own low-lit brasserie with a great band on the stand.

Jim Irvin

Keiron Phelan & Peace Signs
Hobby Jingo

Keiron Phelan & Peace Signs

★★★★

Hobby Jingo

GARE DU NORD. CD/DL

Evocative 'summer album' that's arrived late but is still most welcome.

Multi-instrumentalist Keiron Phelan has recorded with State River Widening and Smile Down Upon Us, but on this second album by his literate pop project, he and his excellent band wish to sail away from our troubled times in a manner reminiscent of Kevin Ayers on Toujours Le Voyage or John Cale on Ship Of Fools. Cinnamon Synthesis is one of the album's sunniest moments with feather-light bossa nova rhythms under Phelan's affable croon and easy-listening backing vocals. He introduces his "trippy, ultra-hippy" girl in New Best Friend over slide guitar and rollicking piano, while Sixth Form Poetry –"It made a pipsqueak out of me" – is funky and flutey. The sardonic bierkeller oompah of What Kaiser Did is darker, mixing romantic longing with international diplomacy, and a piano and vocal cover of Bill Fay's Goodnight Stan is a poignant conclusion.

Mike Barnes

The Nix

★★★★

Sausage Studio Sessions

MOSHI MOSHI. CD/DL/LP

Avant rock, R&B and dub from former Franz Ferdinand guitarist/keyboardist.

THE NIX
SAUSAGE STUDIO SESSIONS

The aim of this debut by the musical collective built around former Franz Ferdinand guitarist/keyboards player Nick McCarthy and producer/songwriter Seb Kellig was, says McCarthy, to capture the vibe of the house parties he used to host when he lived in Munich – where he was classically trained on piano and double bass – and Glasgow where he met Alex Kapranos and formed Franz Ferdinand. Creating a suite of moods and musics to achieve this, tracks veer from the film noir sensibility of Don't Roll Your Eyes At Me to the perfect storm of hip-hop, fractured beats and post punk of Colours, to Until Now All Is Well, a mesmeric roots reimagining of Mal Waldron's Warm Canto featuring the pleasing lilt of Laetitia Sadier.

Lois Wilson

Tom Furse

★★★

Ecstatic Meditations

LO. DL/LP

Healing second LP by The Horrors' synthesist from his studio in Margate.

The almost 19-minute opener Journey In Ecstasy, one of six mood pieces making up Furse's second solo outing, begins with the lapping of waves and seagull cries, then shimmering vibraphone, harp glissandos and a drifting wash of synths create a dreamy sound scenery to escape into; later, pan drums and flutes add to the floatiness. Issued as a part of Lo Recordings' *Spaciousness* series, which explores the possibilities of "ambient, deep listening, new age, fourth world and post classical", Furse's work most obviously touches on the environmental soundscapes of Akira Ito and Yasuaki Shimizu. Furse calls his explorations 'Still Music' – presumably taken from Satoshi Ashikawa's *Still Way* from 1982 – and it's a fitting description: his minimalist, abstract ebbs and flows are both soothing and transportive.

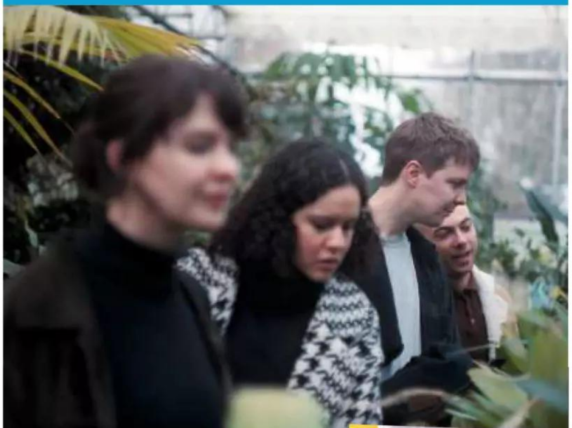
Lois Wilson

Surprise Chef: galloping gourmets go funk.

Izzie Austin

ELECTRONICA

BY STEPHEN WORTHY



Jabu

★★★★

Sweet Company

DO YOU HAVE PEACE?. DL/LP

Bristolians' crepuscular world of dazed beats and gauzy vocals.

JABU'S DOWNTEMPO sound is akin to staring out from a rain-flecked window – shapes lose definition but the experience is vivid. Their 2017 debut, *Sleep Heavy*, was a moving reflection on grief. Now, *Sweet Company* finds the trio – producer Amos Childs and vocalists Alex Rendall and Jasmine Butt (pictured with poet/DJ Daniela Dyson) turning to the more traditional topics of love and relationships. Using a palette of woozy loops, Childs creates lo-fi R&B dipped in ambient and '80s experimental pop (AR Kane and Cocteau Twins are reference points). On Lately, Rendall pleads, in striking falsetto, for the object of his desire to "be cruel to me" atop a 2-step/reggaeton hybrid shot through with dub and slowed to a murmur. Butt's pillowy vocals on Water Temple turn it into ghostly electro doo wop, while Us Alone lurches along wondrously to a rhythm like a grandfather clock gone haywire. A beautiful collection of haunting, comforting reveries.

ALSO RELEASED

Kruder & Dorfmeister

★★★

1995

G-STONE. CD/DL/LP

Pangs of nostalgia strike when listening to this long-player of fuggy, languid downtempo from venerable Austrian duo Peter Kruder and Richard Dorfmeister. Recently discovered in a dusty corner of their studio and remastered – *1995* being its original birth year – the album is a welcome flashback to a sound that deserves urgent reappraisal.

Craven Faults

★★★★

Enclosures

THE LEAF LABEL. DL/LP

Humankind's complex relationship with our landscape is explored within the deep drone, motorik rhythms and delicate analogue melodies that the shadowy Craven Faults fashions from a mighty bank of modular synthesizers, Korg and Farfisa. Rumours still abound about the true identity of its creator, but who cares when the end results are as mesmeric and seductive as this?

Susannah Stark

★★★★

Time Together (Hues And Intensities)

STROOM. DL/LP

When the Dundee-born visual artist Susannah Stark started using sound in her installations, it began a journey that has culminated in this album of contemplative, smoky electronica. With vocals shifting between gentle caress and something more foreboding, the fantastical world that Stark has built on *Time Together* casts a memorable, magical spell.

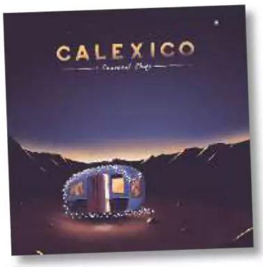
Charles Webster

★★★★

Decision Time

DIMENSIONS. CD/DL/LP

In a career that has spanned three decades thus far, Charles Webster has been a foundational influence on British house music before going on to perform the same role in his new homeland of South Africa. Webster's signature style – atmospheric, brooding – flows through this album of avant-soul, dark downtempo and subtle 4/4 with notable contributions from Burial and Shara Nelson. *SW*



Calexico

★★★

Seasonal Shift

CITY SLANG. **CD/DL/LP**

Tucson desert rock band and international friends' cross-cultural holiday season LP.

The Christmas album is a tough nut to crack. Calexico's trademark rich, heady, cinematic sound might seem perfect for the job – Mexican music is high on the list when it comes to colourful and celebratory – yet many of these 12 songs, eight of them originals, tend towards the reflective. The opening ballad Hear The Bells mentions death and the recession, and even the song named Glory's Hope, a lovely atmospheric instrumental, seems low on both. Writing/recording during lockdown can do that. The most heartwarming seasonal song is Mi Burrito Sabanero, featuring guest singer Gaby Moreno. There are also sweet covers of John & Yoko's Happy Xmas with pedal steel, and Tom Petty's Christmas All Over Again; some sad but lovely fado (Nature's Domain); and the part hip-hop, part vintage gaming soundtrack Sonoran Snoball, ending with season's greetings from participants across the world.

Sylvie Simmons

Gunn-Truscinski Duo

★★★★

Soundkeeper

THREE LOBED. **CD/DL/LP**

Folk rock guitarist's fourth duo improv workout.

Steve Gunn's solo releases this past decade suggest an underground folk rocker moving towards relative songwriting orthodoxy, with scant loss of potency along the way. His duo trips with freestyling drummer John Truscinski, however, tell a very different story. If anything, this fourth instrumental set by the duo is their wildest yet: the influence of Sandy Bull and Billy Higgins' sessions can still be detected, though much of these 72 minutes seem unmoored from even those expansions of folk/jazz. Namechecking Eddie Hazel in one song title, Gunn heads for the furthest abstracted point of Maggot Brain rather than anything conventionally funky. More often, he plays like Peter Green grown up on noise rather than the blues, carving filigree shapes out of the air that are at once melodic and hairily uncompromising. It all peaks on Ocean City, the best of several tracks that recall – inadvertently? – the virtuoso languor of Albatross.

John Mulvey

JACK NAME MAGIC TOUCH

Jack Name

★★★★

Magic Touch

MEXICAN SUMMER. **DL/LP**

Third album from Cali experimentalist.

What we can't do now is touch; so, touch matters more than anything. This latest from Jack Name, a fixture of the LA underground music scene, sees him drop the dense production of his past for something bare, personal and frank, standing so close to the microphone he could hug you with his vocal alone. Spooky, intense loner-folk opener Karolina echoes with longing as he dreams of "lips on lips, hips on hips". Confessions and demands reverberate through Empty Nights, Izella Berman's child-like voice entwining with Name's, clavinet giving this a sepia, Appalachian, White Stripes feel. Slow, stark tracks like Kick-Around Johnny sound like a spun-out, confessional Lou Reed, and there's epiphany too: I Came To Tell You In Plain English (I'm Leaving You) is casually devastating – "Not a thing we did/Ever moved me anyway."

Glyn Brown

Katy Carr

★★★★

Providence

DELUCE. **CD/DL**

Third LP in London singer/songwriter's beguiling Polish roots trilogy.

Katy Carr has been tracing her Polish heritage and her family's World War II story since 2012's grand, compelling *Paszport*. With this final album in the trilogy, she explores themes of good versus evil and the fight for freedom through intensely melodic folk, Renaissance stomp, touches of gospel and Cossack dance. Co-produced with long-term collaborator Rupert Gillett, many songs are inspired by strong characters: like George Orwell, in the looped Wurlitzer and dark drama of Hero To Zero, or Queen Wanda of Poland, leading the Vandals in Miracle On The Vistula, or a playful, arch Queen Elizabeth I in The Virgin Queene. One of the most affecting tracks is Carr's version of Peter Hammill's Afterwards, her shimmering voice and Gillett's gentle cello refashioned as a dedication to her Polish mother.

Lucy O'Brien

KATY CARR
PROVIDENCE

Lucidvox

★★★★

We Are

GLITTERBEAT. **CD/DL/LP**

Russian quartet's first internationally available LP.

Lucidvox are from Moscow. *We Are*, their first traditional album, was preceded by one that was digital only, a couple of digital EPs and a CD EP. Four women, they describe themselves as "psychedelic rock with a Russian folk influence". Their singer doubles on flute, but otherwise it's guitar, bass and drums. Live, they're a heavy, intense and mesmerising maelstrom of wind-tunnel vocals, drones, treated guitar and shamanic rhythms. *We Are* – sung in Russian with titles listed in English – is no less impactful but more nuanced, with odd nods to Death Valley 69 and *EVOL*-era Sonic Youth. But keening vocals, a fondness for droning melodies and hammer-it-to-the-floor bass posit Lucidvox as stepping out of a first-wave goth time machine, where tropes had not yet been established – an nth-degree Xmal Deutschland. Terrific, with innate beauty too.

Kieron Tyler

Matthew Halsall

★★★★

Salute To The Sun

GONDWANA. **CD/DL/LP**

Gifted Mancunian jazz everyman's meditative hymn to the environment.

After the relatively short tunes and lyrical focus of 2015's *Into Forever*, Matthew Halsall's sixth album is an immersive double that restores his blue-toned trumpet to centre stage. Gliding in over running water on rainforest field recordings, bounding transportive musings such as Harmony In Nature, Canopy & Stars and Tropical Landscapes benefit from being trialled and tested in pre-Covid basement sessions with a septet grounded by long-time bassist Gavin Barras's elastic pulse. Maddie Herbert's Alice Coltrane-ish harps and Liviu Gheorghe's restrained piano tap deeper into the spiritual side on '70s sounding The Energy Of Life and the succinct Mindfulness Meditations, a song that should be prescribed nightly by the NHS. *Salute…*. is a ruminative affair, laced with Eastern ambience, its healing qualities apposite with every spin.

Andy Cowan

Matthew Halsall
Salute To The Sun

Kelley Stoltz

★★★★

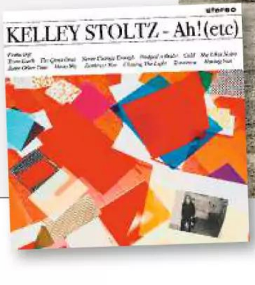
Ah! (etc)

AGITATED. **CD/DL/LP**

San Fran's pop-psych hub ups tools.

TOP DRAWER inspiration is rife on planet Stoltz, hence *Ah! (etc)*, the unstoppable psychonaut's second album of 2020. Named while squiffy on vino watching opera singer performance-art at his favourite 'Frisco bar the Rite Spot, it's variously distinguished by a Move-ish riposte to Billy Joel's Just The Way You Are ("don't go changing") titled Never Change Enough, groovy-to-the-max bossa nova Moon Shy, and Team Earth, which seems to take environmental concerns on an excitable romp through the garage. With Echo & The Bunnymen's Will Sergeant adding lead guitar sparkle to curious upstairs neighbour study The Quiet Ones, and Dirty Ghosts' Allyson Baker guesting on Stoltz's tribute to her, She Likes Noise, it all adds up to a hearty hunk of odd, the exuberant and self-explanatory closer Having Fun boasting twitchy, urgent hooks.

James McNair



Grand Canyon
DDDDallas TX 816
Las Vegas NV
San Antonio TX 368
Roswell NM 358
San Diego CA 519

Kelley Stoltz: a hearty hunk of odd.

CARLTON MELTON
WHERE THIS LEADS

Carlton Melton

★★★★

Where This Leads

AGITATED. CD/DL/LP

Dreamy stoner drones and Cro-Magnon riffage from Californian acid-noisers.

Neil Young once described his discography as "all one song". Similarly, Californian psychedelicists Carlton Melton possess only two gears, their seventh full-lengther shifting, as always, between ambient drones and colossal Sabbath-on-Mogadon riffs, but still working much magic. In the former mode, 17-minute opener The Stars Are Dying is a muted, conversational piece set between the mournful abstraction of Miles Davis's He Loved Him Madly and the emotive improv of Sonic Youth's The Diamond Sea, while Smoke Drip Revisited is like a quarter-speed Grateful Dead jam. In their cosmic stoner-rock setting, the monolithic Waylay slow-builds to a heaviness that could bore through to the Earth's core, pedals set to stun. And where Carlton Melton's questing can occasionally lead them to meander, *Where This Leads* has focus, becoming one of their most solid releases.

Stevie Chick

From the interior: Alex Maas goes deep.

ALEX MAAS Luca

Alex Maas

★★★★

Luca

BASIN ROCK. CD/DL/LP

The front man of Austin psych mainstays the Black Angels sings from the heart.

HAVING UPHELD the Texas tradition of 13th Floor Elevators-style lysergic emanations with The Black Angels, Alex Maas has gone deep into himself for a beautiful solo debut. It combines considered, personal songwriting with a late-'60s edge of hazy paranoia, most of it informed by the joys and responsibilities of fatherhood. Shines Like The Sun and What Would I Tell Your Mother are odes to Maas's baby daughter, while the folksy lullaby The City tells a fairytale story of a citadel whose inhabitants live in happy innocence until hostile forces encroach. There are still Black Angels-like evocations of altered states, such as the dreamy Slip Into, and Maas's band members have all been corralled into contributing to the ever-present reverberating drone, but this is very much a thoughtful, interior record, with its own distinct character and an unsettling quality that gets under your skin.

Will Hodgkinson

Dave Mason

★★★

Alone Together… Again

SHELTER MUSIC. CD/DL

Fifty years on, the former Traffic guitarist re-records his 1970 solo debut.

DAVE MASON
ALONE TOGETHER

Fifty years ago, Dave Mason released a solo debut that became the finest work of his career. So why does he now believe it could have been even better? According to a press release, Mason decided to re-record *Alone Together* in its entirety mainly because he didn't think his original vocals captured the music's soul. Remarkably, *Alone Together … Again* does offer improvements on the esteemed original, though these have less to do with the more mature vocals than with Mason's guitar solos. While they're not necessarily finer than his original runs, they're wonderfully different. The change is most obvious in Look At You, Look At Me, which lasts two minutes longer than the original to now offer over nine minutes of commanding work. Other changes turn up throughout the album, and while none rate as radical, the album as a whole earns its keep simply by finding fresh nuance in a classic.

Jim Farber

Doug Carn

★★★★

JID05

JAZZ IS DEAD. CD/DL/LP

Triumphant return of cult jazz keyboardist.

JAZZ IS DEAD

Seventy-two-year-old Doug Carn is the latest veteran to be plucked from the shadows and get a musical makeover from the Jazz Is Dead label's founders, producers Adrian Younge and Ali Shaheed Muhammad. Carn is best remembered for a quartet of highly regarded spiritual jazz albums he made for Gene Russell's short-lived Black Jazz label in the first half of the '70s. Though in recent years he's recorded a couple of low budget albums for an obscure indie label, his association with Jazz Is Dead will undoubtedly widen his audience. The new 11-track record blends chromatic jazz-funk (Processions) with meditative soundscapes (Down Deep) and shows that Carn's music hasn't lost the otherworldly cosmic vibe that imbued his best '70s releases. The evocative Desert Rain, a filmic dialogue between harmonised horns and Carn's febrile Hammond B3, is the set's standout.

Charles Waring

Shemekia Copeland

★★★★

Uncivil War

ALLIGATOR. CD/DL

Tenth album of topical blues protest, with guests Steve Cropper and Duane Eddy.

SHEMEKIA COPELAND

There's an unrelenting power to Shemekia Copeland's performance on her tenth album; her rich, grainy vocals, sitting midpoint between Ruth Brown and Mavis Staples have never sounded so forceful, and her songwriting, in the context of a divided America, transmits a sense of solidarity and hope throughout. Produced by Will Kimbrough, the opener Clotilda's On Fire tells the story of America's last slave ship, over fearsome guitar-playing by Jason Isbell; the closer Love Song sees daughter pay affectionate tribute to her father Johnny Copeland on his Texas blues. Walk Until I Ride, an impassioned BLM protest in the style of The Staple Singers and the thoughtful title track – a soulful folk address with mandolin, dobro and Hammond B3 – provide more highlights on this career best.

Lois Wilson

Skyway Man

★★★★

The World Only Ends When You Die

MAMA BIRD. CD/DL/LP

Life and death concept album with elaborate '70s-echoing production.

James Wallace AKA Skyway Man's 2017 debut, *Seen Comin' From A Mighty Eye*, was a heady brew of blues, gospel, psychedelia and sci-fi. Its successor aims to fly higher still, landing somewhere between the starry-eyed vibes of Jim Sullivan's *U.F.O.* and Nilsson and Lennon's party-time excellent *Pussycats*. Conceived by Wallace (and recorded with members of the Spacebomb house band) as a suite of songs involving a character returning from a near-death experience, it works just as well without the plot. Still, there are twists and turns aplenty – Did Ya Know Him? sails over a groove reminiscent of The Wailers, via Boney M, and Common Void's star-sailing string and brass arrangement perfectly enhances its troubled dream-state mood. Added strangeness comes from spoken word samples from a 1956 lecture given by George Van Tassel (builder of the Integraton in Joshua Tree) about his abduction by aliens.

Tom Doyle

Tiña

★★★★

Positive Mental Health Music

SPEEDY WUNDERGROUND. CD/DL/LP

Pop-psych quintet displays up-and-down moods in the depths of south London.

Brixton quintet Tiña's mesmerising pop-psych is also a fascinating conundrum. How can such intensely downbeat drama contain frequent moments of joy? Central to the action is vocalist Joshua Loftin, whose explorations of manic depression perhaps explains the fluctuating dynamic. Yet it's also in the way Loftin's deceptively soft, nasally tones – sometimes he resembles a young Ray Davies – habitually lift to falsetto. Equally, Ollie Lester's guitar chimes and needles with unexpectedly golden chord changes. Reference points include Cate Le Bon's uncanny style but also the darker recesses of '80s New Zealand indie, conjoining Syd Barrett fragility with the Velvets' guitar/organ weave. It creates the perfect backdrop for Loftin's imagery – haunted by projections, body horror, crowded buses, "looking out of my wrong eye" and, in the decidedly happy-sad Dip, Loftin's undulating world: "A time to dance… a time to die."

Martin Aston

Boca 45

★★★★

Donuts

B-BLOCK MUSIC. **DL/LP**

Banksy-endorsed Bristol b-boy Scott Hendy collates the five singles that defined his 2020, with a dusting of fresh produce. Short, sweet, funky liaisons: Hannah Williams, The Heavy's Swaby and NYC rap vet Craig G combine with body-moving instrumentals, all baked to perfection. *AC*

Tino Contreras

★★★★

La Noche De Los Dioses

BROWNSWOOD. **DL/LP**

Prolific Mexican jazz drummer-composer returns with a lightly cosmic set that interweaves bass, brass, piano, drums and Hispanic rhythms in hypnotic and exploratory ways, but still cuts a rug. Standout: El Sacrificio (The Sacrifice). *JB*

Danalogue x Alabaster DePlume

★★★★

I Was Not Sleeping

TOTAL REFRESHMENT CENTRE. **DL/LP**

Left of centre cosmic jazz travellers (Danalogue is in The Comet Is Coming), these dreamy dystopian psych jams stimulate. Note especially the Joshua Idehen duet and Guest's piano/sax interplay. *AC*

WAR CLUB
DJ SHUB

DJ Shub

★★★★

War Club

SHUB MUSIC. **CD/DL/LP**

Freed from the druggy demons that haunted his stint in ethnotronica decksmiths A Tribe Called Red, the godfather of powwow step skitters from electro rave and dub reggae to drum'n'bass and, on two outstanding duets with Toronto MC Phoenix, deep hip-hop commentary. *AC*

It's Immaterial

★★★★

House For Sale

BURNING SHED. **CD/DL/LP**

Thirty-four years after this Liverpool duo's hit Driving Away From Home, a third LP of shimmering ambient pop. John Campbell speech-sings of things unsaid, magic and loss, often as the rain falls; it's a seamless addition to a small but perfectly formed back catalogue. *IH*

A WONDERFUL HOPE
LATE NIGHT FINAL

Late Night Final

★★★★

A Wonderful Hope

PIAS. **CD/DL/LP**

Public Service Broadcasting's J Willgoose expands that electronic pop core with four models of retro-futurist techno pop: propulsive (Thank You), brooding (title track), ecstatic (The Human Touch) and sparklingly Kraftwerkian (Slow Release). Each 10-mins plus. *JB*

Left Outsides

★★★★

Are You Sure I Was There?

CARDINAL FUZZ. **DL/LP**

Alison Cotton (viola, keys, sweet voice) and husband Mark Nicholas (guitar) uncover archaic traces of English folk rock: from brooding opener The Wind No Longer Stirs The Trees to Stone Barn's resonant minor chords. Stirring stuff. *JB*

New Age Doom

★★★★

Himalayan Dream Techno

WE ARE BUSY BODIES. **DL/MC**

After 2019's drone metal/free jazz debut, the Vancouverites go further out. Drummer Eric J Breitenbach and Greg Valou's zither-bass are joined by the synth of Tim Lefebvre (Bowie's *Blackstar*) and Sloan's Gregory Macdonald. *AC*

Albertine Sarges

★★★★

The Sticky Fingers

MOSHI-MOSHI. **CD/DL/LP**

Citing Viv Albertine and Merrill Garbus, Berlin-based Sarges audaciously blends itchy-funk, vocal gymnastics and – on Free Today – feminist theory. Highlights: The Girls; flute-laced musings about dogs and smoking; Paul Simon-ish heartbreaker Post Office. *JB*

SMOKESCREENS
A STRANGE DREAM

Smokescreens

★★★

A Strange Dream

SLUMBERLAND. **CD/DL/LP**

LA's bittersweet pop trio land The Clean's David Kilgour to produce their third album and celebrate their shared virtues: chiming guitars and yearning melodies framing quizzical songs, such as What Is To Be Done or the cutely meta Working Title. *JB*

EXTENDED PLAY

Forever autumn: Galaxie 500 (from left) Dean Wareham, Damon Krukowski, Naomi Yang.

20 Covers Of Galaxie 500

A planned live show of bands covering Galaxie 500 for Record Store Day in New York this summer was forced to move online, where 20 of the cult Boston trio's contemporaries and younger fans have posted home video recordings at: www.20-20-20.com

As befits Galaxie 500's Ivy League status in indie rock history, the results are both cerebral and from the heart. Participants include Thurston Moore, Stephin Merritt, Real Estate and Circuit Des Yeux, while their accompanying notes are frequently moving. Grasshopper from Mercury Rev recalls the childlike resonance of Snowstorm, from 1989's *On Fire*, soundtrack to his first year living in New York City. The Rev's shivery take features Psychedelic Furs guitarist John Ashton. In LA, Mark Lanegan and Earth's Dylan Carson despatch Summertime with garage band alacrity, clocking-in at half the time of the burnished original, yet their drone-melody sounds unhurried. With Holy Shit's cover of It's Getting Late, the duo's Matt Fishbeck sweetly recounts how his 15-year-old self played in a G500 tribute band, Tugboat. Fishbeck is now a neighbour of Galaxie singer Dean Wareham. Otherwise, Galaxie 500 themselves remain enigmatic in their absence, leaving their producer Kramer to close with a psychoactive Decomposing Trees and insightful reflection on "the greatest American trio since the Jimi Hendrix Experience".

Snowdrops

★★★★

Volutes

INJAZERO. **CD/DL/LP**

French composers/multi-instrumentalists Christine Ott and Mathieu Gabry emphasise the wavering tones of Ott's Ondes Martenot, whistling its soft, sad refrains like a spectral milkman emerging from an early morning mist of piano, strings and mellotron. *JB*

TENDERLONIOUS
RAGAS FROM LAHORE

Tenderlonious

★★★★

Ragas From Lahore

22A. **CD/DL/LP**

UK jazz free spirit Ed Cawthorne lands in Lahore, his fluttering flute and searching soprano weaving among instrumentalists Jaubi's sarangi, trebly tabla and spiralling drones. Impassioned ragas tapping into a deep well of Eastern spirituality. *AC*

Macioce

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ALL-ACCESS DELUXE BOX, CD AND 2-LP SETS
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Everlasting reign

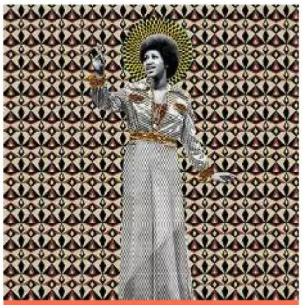
How her first cross-label box set paints a more complete musical portrait of The Queen Of Soul in all her finery. By **Geoff Brown**.

Aretha Franklin

★★★★

Aretha

RHINO. CD/DL/LP



“Sam Cooke’s A Change Is Gonne Come follows Otis’s Respect, giving both an unmistakably 2020 resonance.”

ONE OF THE first essential box sets of the CD era was Rhino’s 1992 *Queen Of Soul*, four discs of vocal dynamite distilled from Aretha Franklin’s Atlantic recordings, 1967 to ’79, AKA the glory years. There have been many Aretha box sets since, some seeking to rewrite history by mitigating the disappointments of her first relationship, with Columbia. There are fine performances to be found there, but nothing can shake the certainty that her very best work was done between the years 1967 and ’72 at Atlantic. Her standards were so high after that year’s live gospel set, *Amazing Grace*, that a procession of star producers failed to recapture her explosive power and emotion, delicacy and truth, quite so consistently, even though her singing was invariably so much better than her competition’s.

Where *Queen Of Soul* restricted itself to Atlantic, the 81 tracks on *Aretha* chart her career’s full arc better than any previous box set, with 19 tracks unheard on CD or digital, in addition to various alternate takes and 2020 remasters. They’re arranged in chronological order, roughly, and we meet her in church in 1956 when she recorded You Grow Closer and Never Grow Old, billed on the original J-V-B single as “Daughter of Rev C.L. Franklin Pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church Detroit, Mich”. She sounds like a mature 30-year-old woman, not a girl half that age with an assertive, expressive and experienced ‘old’ voice in that young body.

BACK STORY: SOMETHING WE CAN FEEL

- Was Aretha’s difficult start in life the source of her ability to tease out the pain and sorrow, the love and joy, in songs? When she was six her mother, Barbara, left the Detroit family home, unable to live with philandering patriarch Rev C.L. Franklin’s affairs. In her gospel years, just a child herself, Aretha gave birth at the ages of 12 and 14. Later, her marriage to Atlantic outlasted marriage to first husband Ted White and her relationship with “soul mate” Ken Cunningham. In 1978, she married actor Glynn Turman, divorcing in ’84. In reality, she was married to music.

Getty (2)

Still only 18 in 1960 when John Hammond signed her to Columbia and tried to turn her into a jazz-blues-standards singer, her albums there were distinguished by increasingly ill-fitting arrangements. Her first hit for them, Today I Sing The Blues, the song she’d sung as a demo for Hammond and would later revisit at Atlantic, was an early template. By 1966, a strong cover of The Box Tops’ Cry Like A Baby and her own A Little Bit Of Soul, soul-gospel with call-and-response backing voices and a warning – “Sittin’ here drinking, I’m trying to write me a song/If I don’t get me a hit soon/I won’t be here long.” In fact, she’d been there for seven years, distilled here into 10 of her better Columbia recordings.

Atlantic’s Jerry Wexler quickly signed her. Two home-recorded demos reveal both the potential and the work to be done. My Kind Of Town, Detroit Is transposes Frank Sinatra’s swinging hymn to Chicago to Motor City, but Try A Little Tenderness as a sultry piano blues is more successful. From there to Muscle Shoals, and the goose bumps start with I Never Loved A Man (The Way I Love You), a real “in the room” shudder of a record, with the acoustic/electric pianos, the backing voices, praising horns, the David Hood/Roger Hawkins rhythm muscle.

Twelve songs on CD1, and all of CDs 2 and 3 are given over to the Atlantic era – although CD3 is where Atlantic and Aretha lose the plot a little. But before we get there, oh my. Even the familiar sounds are elevated, notably the 2018 mono remaster of A Change Is Gonna Come – Sam Cooke’s civil rights anthem-in-waiting follows her profound remodelling of Otis Redding’s Respect, giving both an unmistakably 2020 resonance.

Welcome, too, is the use of live recordings. 1968’s *Aretha In Paris* was by some distance my least favourite of her LPs from this golden age, yet Baby, I Love You from that performance fits. Not as uplifting as the four songs from 1970’s *Live At Fillmore West*: Share Your Love With Me (she actually sounds in love), a breezy Don’t Play That Song, a bluesy Dr Feelgood and Spirit In The Dark, Ray Charles given generous space. No outtakes from *Amazing Grace*, that gospel performance embedded in legend thanks to the revamped movie and a recent full audio LP release, while live duets range from power pairing (It’s Not Unusual/See Saw on UK TV’s This Is Tom Jones) to relaxed friendship (Ooo Baby, Baby with its composer and Detroit friend Smokey Robinson on Soul Train in 1979, is a charmer). Speaking of Smokey, the 2020 remaster of her Tracks Of My Tears cover is terrific, no self-pity here.

Less-regarded tracks – such as The House That Jack Built, 1968’s non-album Aretha-penned flipside to I Say A Little Prayer – get a welcome inclusion, while longer versions of Young, Gifted And Black and church-ready Bridge Over Troubled Water light up dark times and, again, resonate in 2020. Work tapes of You’re All I Need To Get By and Brand New Me open intriguing windows onto her creative instinct as she searches for the right groove.

Difficulties with Atlantic were evident by 1972/73. Wexler was nudged aside as producer. Quincy Jones worked on *Hey Now Hey (The Other Side Of The Sky)*, which flickers without catching fire, but the LPs incidentals fascinate – an alt take of Somewhere (with a fuller piano solo), a work tape of Angel as she corrects the band: “four times and out”. Master Of Eyes (The Deepness Of Your Eyes), a single which later appeared as a CD bonus track, has lasted well, while her own The Boy From Bombay is a real curio – mid-tempo, with a pretty enough melody, it’s a clear work-in-progress. By the fade she’s decided to give it to someone else. She was not always so generous, of course. According to David Ritz’s biography Respect, she usurped her sister Carolyn Franklin’s plans to record with Curtis Mayfield, getting him produce 1976’s *Sparkle*, arguably her last successful album, with Something He Can Feel her final big Atlantic 45. It held the US R&B Number 1 spot for 19 weeks.

Aretha eventually left Atlantic for Arista, who settled her into the ’80s commercial landscape of disco and duets, where records were product. Actually, her music had been heading that way since 1975’s Mr D.J. (5 For The D.J.). Now, the likes of Who’s Zoomin’ Who and I Knew You Were Waiting accelerated the process.

For vinyl connoisseurs, there are double and single album digests, unavailable at press time, as was the release’s booklet. No matter: by focusing on the imperishable achievement of her time at Atlantic, and cherry-picking the Columbia and Arista years, *Aretha* presents us with the most well-rounded portrait there has been of Franklin’s entire recording career.

Young Marble Giants: (from left) Philip Moxham, Alison Statton, Stuart Moxham.

Better with less

Fortieth anniversary edition of the masterpiece of multi-layered minimalism, plus their final day, live. By **Jude Rogers**.

Young Marble Giants

★★★★★

Colossal Youth: 40th Anniversary Edition

DOMINO. CD/DL/LP

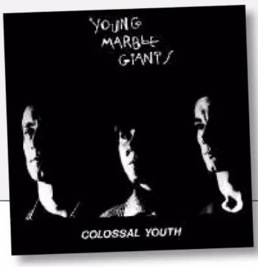
COLOSSAL YOUTH is the sound of Britain's black-and-white past quietly waking up. Twenty-one-year-old Alison Statton is at the microphone, her voice pure but defiant, singing lyrics that still burrow under the skin 40 years later. Some feel like plotlines to absurd children's cartoons ("Eaten out of house and home/Choci Loni starts a roam"). Some conjure up mid-century childhood with an eerie twist ("Call you at teatime/In off the street/Sit down at table/Mummy is neat," goes N.I.T.A.).

Guitars scratch and itch; a Galanti organ whirls; a drum machine pulses playfully. The roots of Sarah Records indie and Ghost Box Records hauntology can be found here. But Young Marble Giants were never a gentle band. Formed in Cardiff in 1978, lead writer/guitarist and organ-player Stuart Moxham described them well in a 1980 Sounds interview: "Young Marble Giants are a reaction to everything successful today."

They didn't like punk, and hadn't heard of post-punk acts like Cabaret Voltaire and The Slits until they signed to Rough Trade, Moxham continues. Stuart's brother Philip, master of the band's lean, skittish bass lines, adds that their influences were Eno, Roxy Music and Kraftwerk. All those bands create a woozy distance in their work, which this trio recasts in a simpler, starker set-up.

Young Marble Giants used the atmospheres they created to do bigger things. They mess around with love song clichés often, as on the brilliant Include Me Out, building on burbling synth echo and a spiky, rockabilly guitar riff: "Rearranging the atoms in my hairdo/Gets me thinking 'bout/Good times I had with you." The title track offers moral lessons against a naïve, nursery rhyme melody ("If you think the world is a machine with one cog, and that cog is you… then you are not in this world/The world is not you"). They also flirt wonderfully with disaster. Eating Noddemix plays like A Day In The Life through the eyes of a young woman from a JG Ballard short story, referencing the 1975 Moorgate tube crash ("Putting on her makeup/She glances at the clock/Next she'll paint her nails/The train has collided/The driver didn't stop"). Dig into the details. It's endlessly nourishing stuff.

This anniversary edition includes the same studio output as the 2007 Domino reissue, plus the band's final concert from New York's Hurrah Club in November 1980. Here, Credit In The Straight World properly snarls: you hear how easily it translated to Hole's 1994 cover on *Live Through This*. The show ends with Final Day, the best ever musical treatment of the banal horrors of nuclear apocalypse, in 105 exquisite seconds. We end in peace in narrow light, the place where this extraordinary music still rests, pulsing with life.



Various

★★★★

Deutsche Elektronische Musik 4 Experimental German Rock And Electronic Music 1971-83

SOUL JAZZ. CD/LP

Soul Jazz's fourth dive into the kosmische beyond.

DEUTSCHE ELEKTRONISCHE MUSIK 4

Among the acts on this trawl of the West German '70s freak scene and its descendants are Munich's global fusionists Between, featuring flautist Sir James Galway, who hit UK Number 3 in 1978 with his serene take on Annie's Song. The elegant balm of their Triumphzug Kaiser Maximilian I contrasts with the teeth-grinding strong-acid end of Krautrock as popularly perceived, but it's illuminative of this contrast-savvy, intelligently sequenced comp. If Can, Harmonia and Amon Düül II are essential but familiar, the pleasing jolts come when, for example, Conrad Schnitzler's electronic minimalism from 1978 segues into Kalacakra's Tibetan ethno-forgery from 1972. Encompassing acoustic repose, jazz and Beat Club organ wailing, it also includes tracks by Witthüser & Westrupp, Agitation Free and Alex, whose vegetable man pulsator Patella Black features the Czukay/Liebezeit Can rhythm section chasing a Vitamin C-like trance state.

Ian Harrison

Fine Young Cannibals

★★★★

The Raw & The Cooked

LONDON. CD/DL/LP

From Brum to the world, 1989 UK/US chart topper on vinyl and an expanded 2-CD.

FINE YOUNG CANNIBALS
FYC
THE RAW & THE COOKED

Emerging in 1985 from the wreckage of The Beat, the FYC trio of bassist David Steele, guitarist Andy Cox and yearning soul singer Roland Gift (alumnus of Yorkshire ska band the Akrylykz) made a Europe-wide impact with the electro R&B of their self-titled debut album (also reissued and expanded). But it was with this 1989 follow-up that they struck gold, selling three million copies and bagging two US Number 1s with the stark modernist shapes of She Drives Me Crazy (co-produced at Paisley Park with Prince sidekick David Z) and the updated Northern soul of Good Thing. In a punchy 35 minutes, they also covered Funky Drummer-rooted funk, Drifters-fashioned '50s balladeering and Eddie Cochran rock, turning in an eclectic but sharply-honed album that rightly took them to the toppermost of the poppermost.

Tom Doyle

Sonny Rollins

★★★★

Rollins In Holland

RESONANCE. CD/DL/LP

The saxophone colossus in towering form from 1967.

SONNY ROLLINS IN HOLLAND

Few saxophonists had a more distinctive tone than Sonny Rollins. Now retired, he played with unparalleled natural power, depth and spontaneity, and pioneered the lack of chordal underpinning, like piano or guitar. These three 1967 Dutch gigs also capture his disinterest in the artifice of genre in the pursuit of pure musicality. Backed by bassist Ruud Jacobs and drummer Han Bennink, Rollins' tenor functions as lead voice as well as flawless timekeeping adjunct in lieu of piano – even when he's dispensed with melodic frame altogether and is blowing free. Sonny performs traditional American song (Gershwins, Rodgers & Hart) and contemporary jazz (Miles Davis and his own originals). And when he intersperses the melody of There's No Place Like Home into chestnut Three Little Words, the American abroad's abundant wit will make you smile.

Michael Simmons

Various

★★★

Southeast Of Saturn

THIRD MAN. CD/DL/LP

Back when the Motor City aimed for the moon.

You'd expect a 19-song excavation of Detroit's '90s shoegaze cluster to hit heavy beneath the haze, like MC5 adding muscle under the sparkling skin of My Bloody Valentine. But this compilation reinforces the sprawl of Stateside space-rock – the soporific tones of The Delta Waves' Andromeda Drone, the flute-laced pop of Miss Bliss's Grey, the metallic churn of Glider's Shift. In his incisive linernotes, Dave Segal notes the boomlet's imported origins, detectable in the J. Spaceman adulation of Ten Second Dynasty or the Flying Saucer Attack-orbiting of Children's Ice Cream. But the sharpest stuff has a striking domestic streak. Thirsty Forest Animals tuck some Motown into their chiming Britpop, while Calliope's brilliant jangle Laughing At Roadsigns sports the adolescent sneer of Dazed And Confused. "Working for nothing but records and dope," goes this set's incidental mantra. "Live for the day, man, we'll never grow old."

Grayson Haver Currin

Andrew Tucker

Boris

★★★★

Amplifier Worship

THIRD MAN. DL/LP

Tokyo doom-metal trio's pioneering second downtuned blitzkrieg.

The doom genre was in its infancy when Boris's debut album, 1996's *Absolutego* (also reissued by Third Man this month), served up one hour-long drone-fest, only for Sleep's *Dopesmoker* to steal its thunder that same year as a benchmark of 60-minute time-stretched loudness. By the mid-'00s, a Sunn O))) collaboration and their own *Pink* installed Boris as pioneers, while earlier outings like this indicatively titled double from 1998 were hailed as classics. One of three 15-minute tracks, Ganbou-Ki presents Boris at their volatile best, starting in a textbook grunge-on-16rpm riff, soon progging out to a fast stumbling beat, finding idyllic *Kosmische* resolution, until the beat kicks back in for more fierce pummelling. Straddling metal, Krautrock and Japanese prog (see Les Rallizes Dénudés), *Amplifier Worship* is a good first stop for newcomers – protracted enough to be representative, but compositionally to-the-point and mighty fiery.

Andrew Perry

The drinks are on him: Keith Richards (third right) and X-Pensive Winos order a round.

Keith Richards And The X-Pensive Winos

★★★★

Live At The Hollywood Palladium

BMG. CD/DL/LP

Richards' famed December 1988 bash gets the box-set treatment.

ASSEMBLED WHILE making Keef's pukka solo debut *Talk Is Cheap,* The X-Pensive Winos looked like a shot across Mick Jagger's bows as The Glimmer Twins weathered a spell of mutual froideur. But the Winos were a glorious hang for Richards too, The Human Riff operating as the louche and much-enthused epicentre of an able, multiracial band who, as this sparky set documents, served Big Enough as raucous funk, skanked a treat on Too Rude, reinvented Time Is On My Side as doo wop, and were playful enough to revisit Lennon & McCartney's Stones leg-up, I Wanna Be Your Man. *Live…* also reminds us that Keef could really sing back then, his smoky duet with Sarah Dash on Make No Mistake a lovely thing masterfully played. Box set extras include a 40-page hardback book and a facsimile of Richards' handwritten setlist.

James McNair

David Bowie

★★★★

Metrobolist (AKA The Man Who Sold The World) 50th Anniversary Edition

PARLOPHONE. CD/DL/LP

The classic 11-track album with cover artwork based on the original US release.

There were flashes of brilliance before 1970, of course, but this really starts the Bowie story as musical innovator. The soundscape on classics like The Width Of A Circle, All The Madmen and Saviour Machine is troubled and unhinged – a loud electric bass, brilliant lead guitar lines, Moog synth (here, slightly lower in the mix), odd descant recorder – with Bowie inventing a super-animated vocal style. A new mix by original producer Tony Visconti gives more clarity, vocal surprises such as additional Bolan impersonations on Black Country Rock, a counted-in beginning to the original title track and a mocking "Hah ha" at the end of the album. But with no shortage of reissues since Bowie's death in 2016, the question is: are we getting more of what we already have or something genuinely new? And here, some hardcore fans might judge harshly.

David Buckley

King Crimson

★★★

The Complete 1969 Recordings

PANEGYRIC. CD

Twenty-six discs document the line-up that made *In The Court Of The Crimson King*.

What's the loudest sound in prog? The collective yowl of King Crimson completists realising another box set celebrating the band's mighty debut is on the way. They've bought the *Epitaph* retrospective and the 40th and 50th anniversary *Crimson King* boxes. They've also purchased the download-only ex-bootleg live sets. Now here's all that music with a smattering of add-ons that amount to every known recording of that first line-up. What else? There's a disc that features an ingenious mash-up of studio chatter and music and some 360-degree Steven Wilson remixes. Another CD features the better efforts of Crimson's predecessor, Giles, Giles And Fripp. How that wonky crew progressed to the neutron blast of *ITCOTCK* is one of rock's abiding mysteries. Crimson supremo Robert Fripp has made the valid point that no one is forcing fans to buy these lavishly upholstered offerings – but plenty clearly can't resist. Coffee tables, brace yourselves.

John Bungey

Steve Wynn

★★★★

Decades

REAL GONE MUSIC. CD/DL

Eleven CDs of Dream Syndicate leader's guitar-driven solo work, 1995-2005.

Unlike many of his Paisley Underground peers, Wynn has remained committed, making over 20 albums between the original and current incarnations of The Dream Syndicate. *Decades* eschews the country-mellow detour of his first three solo albums to start with 1996's *Melting In The Dark*, restoring Wynn's signature gnarly edges, inspired by The Velvet Underground's R&B rumblings, guitars tightly coiled and Wynn's voice fusing Lou Reed and a snake-oil salesman. Over the next six studio long-players here, Wynn mostly tweaks the formula, on 2001's double album *Here Come The Miracles* more than most: Morningside Heights is a soft-rock ballad; Southern California Line emulates The Dream Syndicate's runaway-train vibe. No Tomorrow (from 2005's *…Tick…Tick…Tick*) does likewise while vacillating between Hüsker Dü and garage rock models of thrilling, full-blooded guitar. *Decades* comes with 57 unreleased tracks and many guests

Martin Aston

The Fall

★★★★

The Frenz Experiment (Expanded Edition)

BEGGARS ARKIVE. CD/LP

From 1988, a Top 20 album buffs up, bugs out.

In the nine months that preceded this long-player, Mark E Smith's adversarial crew had Top 40 hits – admittedly with R. Dean Taylor and Kinks covers – and, remarkably, supported U2. Mainstream tilts to be sure, but not ones to prepare you for *The Frenz Experiment*. With Smith lucidly illicid and the blessed Scanlon/Hanley guitar/bass axis in full dredger mode, various familiar humours get minimised and/or amplified: mob/meat enigma The Steak Place features just guitar and voice, while demonic possession DTs episode Bremen Nacht crunches bones: Stasi surveillance, melting surrealist clocks and snarky digs at Marillion and The Cure also go in the blender. Similarly, the extras display few wrong moves, with an unreleased Janice Long session and deep-gloom B-side Mark'll Sink Us among the highlights. *The Frenz…* is an atypical, welcome reminder of when all was right in The Fall's autonomous oblast of the mind.

Ian Harrison

These New Puritans

★★★★

Hidden (MMXX)

DOMINO. CD/DL/LP

Ten years ago today, art-rock bros taught themselves to play… bassoon.

"For now we are almost silent," notes the homepage of the agit-classicists These New Puritans. Fans of the diligently outré Southend-On-Sea siblings must console themselves with this expanded 10-year anniversary edition of second LP *Hidden*, on which a post-punk duo jackknifed into experiments with the bassoon. Jack (multi-instrumentalist/vocalist) and George Barnett (vibe controller/drummer), have traded as TNP since 2006, but *Hidden* set them free. To an initial mix of Wu-Tang, ticking clock and snarled intent was added lullaby piano, taiko drums and clanky vibes; Jack developed his croon and B&Q was explored for the perfect chain. *Hidden* reached 100 in the UK charts, but its extensive spadework continues to bear strange fruit. Without the hours of experiment they'd never have reached the exquisite ambience of fourth LP *Inside The Rose*. *Hidden*'s six extra mixes include Hologram for Reich-like piano and Drum Courts Hidden live in Paris.

Andrew Collins

FILE UNDER...

And this is them: the young Elton John (right) and Bernie Taupin.

GettyImages David Gahr

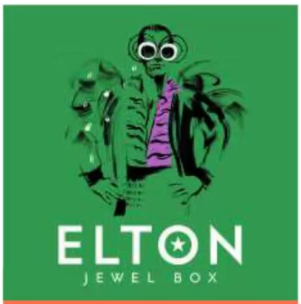
Massive and bijou

Elton John throws open his *Jewel Box*. By **Jim Irvin**.

TO MARK THE 50th anniversary of his breakthrough – the year of *Elton John*, Your Song and *Tumbleweed Connection* – the artist formerly known as Reg Dwight has plunged into his bulging vault and emerged clutching a weighty selection of unlit works freed from their bushel. *Jewel Box* (★★★★) (UMC) is not, as it might first appear, a giant helping of B-sides, outtakes and discards; it's more peculiar than that, a feast for the committed follower in three huge courses which he calls "an alternative history". Thirty-one tracks are gathered onto 2-CDs or 4-LPs, under the heading *Deep Cuts* – Elton's favourite songs that fame has not seen fit to shine on. Solid things like Mellow (*Honky Chateau*) with Jean Luc Ponty playing violin through a Leslie cabinet, the epic Ticking (*Caribou*), The Beach Boys-channelling Chameleon (*Blue Moves*) and selections from the album with Leon Russell, *The Union*, a project close to Elton's heart which was comparatively overlooked.

Elton never considered himself a singles artist. Early on he was marketed as an authentic singer-songwriter, though a wide stripe of artifice was always present in the cod-American accent serving the gospel and Americana fixation he shared with Bernie Taupin. John and Taupin – both extremely shy, apparently – were brought together in 1967 by Liberty Records' A&R Ray Williams. Taupin moved down from Lincolnshire and the 'boys' (Elton 20, Taupin 17) shared bunk beds in Elton's parents' place in Northwood Hills, in a room neatly divided to display their different enthusiasms: Elton's collection of part-work magazines versus Bernie's books on the wild west, with pride of place devoted to their albums. It took a while to find the requisite balance of their enthusiasms to make an impact. Section two of this box, *Rarities 1965-71* charts that development from Elton's first recordings with Bluesology to *Madman Across The Water*. (The final demo is that album's All The Nasties, a kind of coming-out nobody noticed.)

Their first writing efforts were spirited but jejune, Taupin's naïve verses (A Dandelion Dies In The Wind; Tartan Coloured Lady) not yet able to withstand being set to music, though Elton considered them "enchanting". You hear the team developing swiftly. But after years of barely a bite for their very distinctive output – most presented here as rough piano and vocal demos – a solo career seemed the only feasible outlet. Buoyed by the support of the tight, creative circle at Dick James Music – figures like plugger Steve Brown, who suggested they stop chasing Top 20 success, and future band-member Caleb Quaye, who engineered an uncompleted album, *Regimental Sgt. Zippo* – finally, in 1969, Elton made *Empty Sky*, its title track a strong signal this kid was worth watching. Daryl Easlea's excellent liner essay is vital for fully appreciating these early recordings. This section also adds 36 B-sides from 1976-2005, many previously only on vinyl. If you're anxious to hear Choc Ice Goes Mental or Did Anybody Sleep With Joan Of Arc, this is where to come. (Only five of these tracks make the vinyl edition.)



"A solo career seemed the only possible outlet."

The final course, a single CD & double LP, *And This Is Me*, gathers 16 songs discussed in his autobiography, Me, starting with Empty Sky, moving through Border Song, Song For Guy, Sartorial Eloquence and ending on his award-winning duet with Rocketman star Taron Egerton, (I'm Gonna) Love Me Again. Elton's showbiz instincts, and extreme success, obscured his deep love and understanding of certain (now unfashionable?) strands of pop, which he was/is excellent at replicating. It's that side of his work that shines from this thumping box. The boa and big-shades Elton pictured on the front is not the one inside.

ELLA
THE LOST BERLIN TAPES

Ella Fitzgerald

★★★★

The Lost Berlin Tapes

VERVE. CD/DL/LP

Two years after a legendary concert, a return to Berlin produced more magic.

The 1960 Berlin concert, distinguished by a madcap Mack The Knife in which the great lady scatted through a forgotten lyric, had been a career peak. Back in the city in March '62, Ella Fitzgerald was again in magnificent form, from frisky opener Cheek To Cheek to the muscly closing track, Wee Baby Blues. On signature sax-like extemporisations (Cry Me A River, not at all 'torch') and swing (I Won't Dance) to the gentler Someone To Watch Over Me, and a speed-of-sound Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie, Ella always sounds delighted to be sharing her voice with her audience. There was a period when Billie Holiday and Dinah Washington were considered more 'authentic', and here some treatments could be faulted – she races through Taking A Chance On Love as if she has a train to catch – but as she ends with Mr Paganini and a return to Mack The Knife, her happy-go-lucky swing is as winning as ever.

Geoff Brown

Brian Eno

★★★★

Film Music 1976-2020

UMC. CD/DL/LP

Comprehensive trawl through the ambient one's cine music highlights.

Brian Eno's music has long suggested the visual – he began as a painter and his ambient work is often expressive of glimpseable space. Unlike 1978's *Music For Films*, which included pieces for imaginary as well as existing movies, *Film Music 1976-2020* corrals 17 genuine soundtrack essays, composed for some stellar auteurs including Michelangelo Antonioni (Beyond The Clouds), Derek Jarman (Sebastiane) and David Lynch (Dune). Eno's facility for melody and ion-stimulating atmosphere are common denominators, whether it's the electronic music-box theme from Top Boy, the neoclassical synth clouds of Decline And Fall, from Henrique Goldman's O Nome da Morte, or the, space-country glide of Deep Blue Day (famously used in Trainspotting's lavatorial fantasy scene). An airy cover of William Bell's You Don't Miss Your Water (from Married To The Mob), meanwhile, serves to remind of Eno's gloriously empyrean singing voice.

David Sheppard

Jon Anderson

★★★★

Song Of Seven

ESOTERIC. CD

Yes singer's spritely second solo album.

Beyond Rick Wakeman's startlingly successful first three albums, Yes members' solo works have struggled. Outside his work with Vangelis, Jon Anderson is no exception, but 1980's self-produced, self-arranged and almost entirely self-written *Song Of Seven* deserved a better fate than a four-decade wait for rehabilitation. Shorn of the baggage that accompanied the squabbling collective that was Yes – none of whom were invited to guest – Anderson was reborn. Sprawling title track aside, very little nodded to the mothership. Instead, Anderson painted his own, inventive, accessible pictures: For You For Me is a brisk opening earworm; Jack Bruce adds bass to the whipsmart Heart Of The Matter and British jazz giant Johnny Dankworth's saxophone soars over the Allen Toussaint-like swamp of Don't Forget (Nostalgia). Better still is the simple, anxiety-relieving balm of Take Your Time. *Tales From Topographc Oceans* it isn't.

John Aizlewood

PORT SULPHUR
COMPENDIUM

Port Sulphur

★★★★

Compendium

CREEPING BENT. CD/DL

Art-pop assemblage with members of Orange Juice, Fire Engines, Suicide and more.

Douglas MacIntyre has been a live accomplice to Vic Godard and The Fire Engines' Davy Henderson – here both sing on recordings previously released as part of MacIntyre's ongoing Port Sulphur collective. An exhilarating Henderson vocal leads the rapturous Velvet Underground-tinged Beat-poet pop of Exploding Clockwork, a co-composition with Orange Juice's James Kirk. Vocals from Suicide's Alan Vega, on the mechanised Red Star, and from Monica Queen on the delicate indie-soul of Towerblock show that stylistic variance is key at this wonderful musical salon. And again on Alex Discord, a variation on Alex Harvey's Faith Healer, with a gnarly vocal from the late rock poet Jock Scot.

Roy Wilkinson

Ryuichi Sakamoto

★★★★

Hidari Ude No Yume

WEWANTSOUNDS. CD/LP

Pop-edged third album from Yellow Magic Orchestra synth icon, restored to original Japanese edition.

Recorded in the same year – 1981 – that Sakamoto transformed from a much-respected session musician into an exotica star in Yellow Magic Orchestra, this third outing befitted his elevated status. An ambitious meld of pop, electronica and avant-garde, criss-crossed with the Sho and Hichiriki flutes of Japanese classical music, Sakamoto's ability to charm tangential magic from unlikely interweaving themes and mechanical bass lines (Boku No Kakera; The Garden Of Poppies) was assisted by his sparing deployment of Adrian Belew's wayward guitar and Satoshi Nakamura's unearthly sax. As splashes of Debussy frolic through Relâché and the discordant computer strings and murmured vocals of Venezia, it is very easy to imagine Gary Numan and David Sylvian furiously scribbling down notes. Overseen by M's Robin Scott and appended with a full instrumental mix, *Hidari Ude No Yume* restates both Sakamoto's melodic prescience and his enduring craftsmanship.

Andy Cowan

Uriah Heep

★★★

Fifty Years In Rock

BMG. CD/DL

Half-a-century of very 'eavy, very 'umble Brit hard rockers.

First things first, *Fifty Years In Rock* doesn't skimp on serving the Heep faithful. All of their 24 studio albums, plus the 1973 live double LP, are included in this super-deluxe box, alongside an additional four discs of hits and deeper cuts, hand-picked by key members, past and present, including their now late ex-drummer Lee Kerslake. Age hasn't always been kind to Heep's rich stew of operatic melodrama and heavy metal. Still, there's gold among the chicken-in-a-basket ballads and by-numbers boogie. In a parallel universe, Heep's burly 1982 comeback, *Abominog*, could have relaunched them as UK chart rivals to Rainbow and Whitesnake etc, while the vintage Gypsy's gonzo riff sounds like Soundgarden 20 years early. Completists will be rubbing their hands with glee – much like the unctuous Charles Dickens character after which the band were named.

Mark Blake

URIAH HEEP
50 YEARS IN ROCK

Various

★★★★

The 'Sound' Of The R&B Hits

ACE. CD/DL

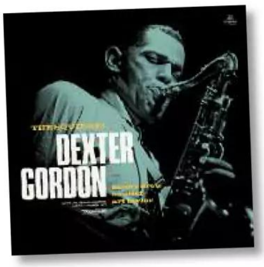
The UK's early introduction to a sound that would permeate the '60s.

BEFORE THE launch of Tamla-Motown in the UK, early releases from Detroit appeared here on labels such as Oriole, London American and Stateside, the last of which released this introductory comp in May 1964, when Smokey Robinson represented Motown more than Holland-Dozier-Holland. Vocals and arrangements were rougher and more aggressive (hear Mary Wells' version of Smokey's Shop Around and her own Bye Bye Baby), and The Marvelettes' three tracks included an unexpected cover of Roy Orbison's hit Dream Baby. The original album's 14-song tracklist is now doubled, so big hitters like Marvin Gaye arrive (Can I Get A Witness; Pride And Joy; Hitch Hike) as do unknown white acts The Valadiers and Mike & The Modifiers. But how did the original compiler prefer The Miracles' Do You Love Me to The Contours' unfettered and much-covered version? At least Barrett Strong's similarly compelling Money (That's What I Want) made that original cut.

Geoff Brown

The Marvelettes: Motown dream babys.

the 'sound' of the R & B hits...
THE MIRACLES
MARY WELLS
THE MARVELETTES
MARTHA and the VANDELLAS
THE SUPREMES
BARRETT STRONG
sing



Dexter Gordon

★★★★

The Squirrel

PARLOPHONE/WARNER MUSIC. **LP**

Vinyl debut for saxophone giant's late-'60s Copenhagen concert.

Gordon's disenchantment with America, where black musicians suffered daily racial harassment, led him to seek a new life in Europe, where he found respect and freedom. The 6'6" saxophonist settled in Denmark and had been living there five years when Danish radio recorded him playing in Copenhagen's Jazzhus Montmartre venue in June 1967. First issued in 1997 on CD, the recording is now reactivated on double vinyl. Gordon plays like a man possessed while fronting a quartet that includes pianist Kenny Drew and drummer Art Taylor, who attacks his kit on the faster numbers with a frightening ferocity. Both the self-penned Cheese Cake and a thrilling remake of Sonny Rollins' Sonnymoon For Two exude an intensely raw, primal, energy, but arguably more rewarding is the lone slow ballad, You've Changed, where Gordon reveals his gentle, more lyrical, side.

Charles Waring

Fatboy Slim

★★★

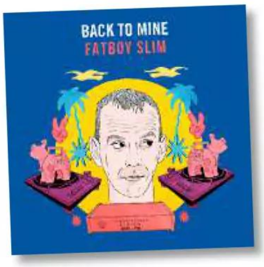
Back To Mine

BACK TO MINE. **CD/DL/LP**

Hawaiian-shirted big beat legend's hedonistic home selection.

Spotted mixing Greta Thunberg's United Nations speech into Right Here, Right Now at his late 2019 arena shows, Labour leader Keir Starmer's old classmate has relied on DJ skills to pay the bills since his chart peak of the late '90s. Fortunately, Norman Cook's live sets do exactly what they promise – get people dancing – with minimal self-consciousness. His beat-making alias's contribution to DMC's enduring *Back To Mine* series is equally upfront, mixing up reggae (Dave & Ansell Collins), house (Jesus Jackson), Chicago soul (Eunice Collins) with deep dives (Wind; Googie Rene) and instantly familiar efforts he's already plundered hard for hooks (Johnny Dynell; Camille Yarbrough). It closes with two gentler, unreleased Cook productions: a squiggling one-two with Roland Clark, and a warming haze of soft-cushioned ambience – perfect for shooing exhausted guests out the door.

Andy Cowan



Isobel Campbell

★★★★

Milkwhite Sheets

COOKING VINYL. **CD/DL/LP**

Ex-Belle & Sebastian singer/guitarist/cellist's fourth solo LP, on vinyl with gatefold.

After the serene California indie pop of Campbell's 2020 solo album *There Is No Other*, it's intriguing to revisit this mostly sparse, very British folk album, full of songs about false young men and foggy mornings, roving eyes and mountain dew. Released in 2006 – same year as *Ballad Of The Broken Seas*, her duets album with Mark Lanegan – its 13 songs include traditional songs covered by Shirley Collins and Jean Ritchie, new originals in a similar style (Beggar, Wiseman Or Thief) and some instrumentals, the best being James, sounding like a Nick Drake tribute. Campbell would doubtless admit that her wispy, childlike voice was no match for Sandy Denny's on a song like Reynardine; what she does bring to the songs is delicacy (O Love Is Teasin'), dreamy intimacy (Yearning), a haunted, almost menacing beauty (Are You Going To Leave Me?) and psych-folk (epic closer Thursday's Child).

Sylvie Simmons

Isobel Campbell: delicacy and a haunted beauty.

Various

★★★

Late Night Tales – Khruangbin

NIGHT TIME STORIES. **CD/DL/LP**

Houston trio's eclectic selection for the series which gave them a leg-up.

"I hope this transmission finds you soon," says Tierney Malone over Geoffrey Muller's beautifully rendered banjo version of Satie's Gnossienne No 1, in the spoken word finale which is the signature move of this long-running sequence of bespoke compilations. The career uptick registered by the then-unknown Khruangbin after inclusion in Bonobo's 2013 entry into the Late Night Tales canon testifies to the potential reach of the enterprise, but since Spotify has remade so many listeners' soundworlds in the image of the curated mixtape, the margin of error for compilers has narrowed. And while Khruangbin's own cover of Kool & The Gang's Summer Madness is a technical knock-out, the two-punch combination of Maxwell Udoh's inaptly titled Nigerian disco landmark I Like It (Don't Stop) and David Marez's florid Ensename is distinctly below the belt.

Ben Thompson

Loleatta Holloway

★★★★

Loleatta/Cry To Me

KENT. **CD/DL**

Chicago shouter's first two albums from 1973 and '75 respectively.

After her success singing gospel with The Caravans and before her much sampled disco-era hits, Loleatta Holloway recorded two albums of spectacular soul for Atlanta's Aware label. Both produced by her husband/songwriter Floyd Smith, 1973's *Loleatta* is a showreel for her colossal vocal, exultant and stirring on the punchy funk of Only A Fool, vehement and testifying on the ballad Part Time Lover – Full Time Fool, urbane with gravitas on Gerswhin's The Man I Love. 1975's *Cry To Me*'s title track provided her with a first US Top 10 soul hit, and Sam Dees' I Know Where You're Coming From from the same album carries another penetrating Holloway performance – although it's on Ruby Andrews' Casanova (Your Playing Days Are Over), with its swoon of strings, that she hits peak intensity.

Lois Wilson

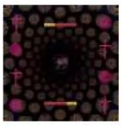
Swans

★★★★

Children Of God

MUTE/YOUNG GOD. **CD/DL/LP**

Michael Gira's noisenik game-changer from 1987, expanded.



After Gira's extreme-noise/battery approach reached critical mass on the fearsome, industrial-influencing *Greed/Holy Money* records, the ensuing New Mind single marked a shift in intensity. It was no less punishing in its slow-grind dissembling of evangelical thought processes (inspired by Jimmy Swaggart), but a more widescreen production made for aural space, and a sense of meticulously devastating songcraft. The double-whammy *Children Of God* duly unveiled the full expanse of the vision, often in crushing juxtapositions: New Mind's manly roar leads into In My Garden, an exquisitely bleak folky meditation of mortality, coo'd by Gira's female foil/partner, Jarboe. Similarly, the beyond-nightmarish Beautiful Child (father sacrifices own son, goes nuts) is followed by Jarboe's terrifyingly seductive Blackmail. Live, Swans remained brutal beyond compare, the legendary London stop on the *Children* tour prompting ear-bleeding, vomiting and many a hasty exit. With a concurrent Stateside show included as a bonus disc (CD) or download (vinyl), this is Gira's awe-inspiring high water mark.

Andrew Perry

VINYL PACKAGE OF THE MONTH

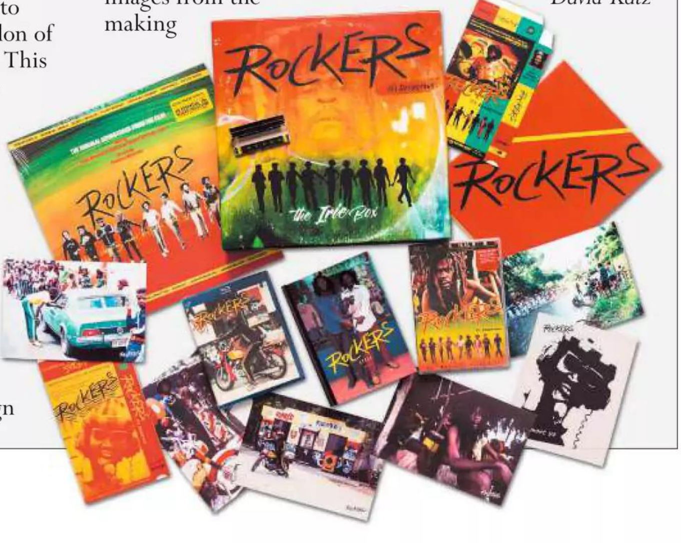
Rockers

The Irie Box

MVD VISUAL

IMMORTAL reggae movie Rockers cast drummer Leroy 'Horsemouth' Wallace as himself in the lead role – a Rastafari session player and record plugger, struggling to survive in the Babylon of late 1970s Jamaica. This lavish box set is the complete Rockers package with a remastered soundtrack on red, green and gold vinyl, the 25th anniversary DVD with bonus commentary from director Ted Bafaloukos and a Blu-Ray with foreign subtitles, along with an original poster, large-format postcards, original VHS covers, themed rolling papers, an iron-on T-shirt decal and, best of all, a limited-edition Japanese hardcover book, Rockers Style Complete: with 240 full-colour images from the making of the film; candid portraits of Gregory Isaacs, Peter Tosh, Big Youth, Burning Spear, Kiddus I and Bunny Wailer add an evocative visual context to this great work. In short, an essential bundle for all reggae heads.

David Katz



THE WHITE STRIPES
GREATEST HITS

The White Stripes

★★★★

Greatest Hits

THIRD MAN/COLUMBIA. CD/DL/LP

Straightforwardly fantastic primer on the peerless power duo.

Not for Jack and Meg White the modern expediency of adding unreleased curios and reunion tracks to their Best Of comp. Instead, The White Stripes' *Greatest Hits* is as fittingly reductive and simplistic as the name suggests: a 26-song tracklist of such blinding obviousness that their fans could have predicted every inclusion – save, perhaps, the breakdown exotica of 2005's The Nurse. For all White's pandering to collectors via the Third Man Vault series, of course, The White Stripes were always an immediate, oddly populist singles band. And so this selection, coming 10 years after they officially disbanded, is a useful and thoroughly entertaining précis of one of the great 21st century rock projects. Chronology is disdained: Seven Nation Army closes the show. And the verité garage/blues rawness of the original recordings is unmediated by remixing or remastering – it's just the phenomenal essence of the Stripes, as timeless and potent as ever.

John Mulvey

Pink Floyd

★★★

Delicate Sound Of Thunder

WARNER MUSIC. CD/LP/BR/DVD

Roger Waters-free 1987-8 comeback tour revisited.

Recorded at New York's Nassau Coliseum in August 1988, this remastered live album documents Pink Floyd on the cusp of a new era, while the deluxe box edition fleshes out the story with bonus tracks and a DVD of the show. With bassist/lyricist Roger Waters gone, frontman/guitarist David Gilmour does most of the heavy lifting, assisted by Floyd mainstays Rick Wright and Nick Mason, and a supporting cast of extras, including new boys, keyboard player Jon Carin and bassist Guy Pratt. Front-loading with songs from their new sequencer-heavy *A Momentary Lapse Of Reason* LP date-stamps the performance, though older entries from the catalogue, including a thunderous One Of These Days and Time, haven't aged one iota. In hindsight it seems brave, even foolhardy, to follow a seismic Comfortably Numb with *A Momentary Lapse…*'s One Slip, complete with Guy Pratt's slap bass solo, but these were strange times.

Mark Blake

Neil Young & Crazy Horse

★★★

Return To Greendale

REPRISE. CD/DL/LP

Neil's undervalued rock opera is back – this time as a live album.

Most fans, one suspects, will be more concerned with the imminent arrival of the '70s Neil motherlode in *Archives 2*. Nevertheless, this less-anticipated addition to Young's ever-expanding universe is also welcome: another chance to visit his homespun eco-opera, Greendale. A Blu-Ray from the 2003 tour captures the project's rickety, hippy community theatre vibes – if not the animosity of disgruntled gig-goers craving the unforthcoming hits. The live album, meanwhile, is a useful document of Crazy Horse in rare, relatively subtle trio form (no Poncho), simmering away as Young tries to wrangle his hokey small-town murder plot into something approaching useful songform. He doesn't always succeed, but the weird ambition and raw-as-hell blues can still be compelling. And in Grandpa's Interview there's a neglected 21st century Crazy Horse classic – a 13-minute slow-burn, with even more gorgeous solos on this live take, to file alongside 2012's Ramada Inn.

John Mulvey

COMING NEXT MONTH…

Sleaford Mods, Kiwi Jr, Belle & Sebastian, James Yorkston, M Ward, The Band, Mica Paris, Frank Zappa, Goat Girl (below) and more…

REISSUES EXTRA

BRITISH SEA POWER
OPEN SEASON

British Sea Power

★★★★

Open Season

ROUGH TRADE. CD/LP

BSP's 2005 second album, now a gatefold double long-player with radio sessions, B-sides etc. Its dramatic Eno-ish rock spoke of bookish romantics who liked the outdoors (presaging by some years the trend for urbanites to take up wild swimming etc). *JB*

The Chills

★★★★

Submarine Bells

FIRE. LP

Martin Phillipps' ascending Dunedin crew left Flying Nun for major subsidiary Slash in 1990, gilding their high quality, '60s psych-influenced indie pop with studio polish, to win commercial success and melodic highs (Heavenly Pop Hit). Also reissued: '92's essentially solo *Soft Bomb*. *JB*

Elvis Costello

★★★★★

The Complete Armed Forces

UME. LP

Nine vinyl discs and prolix (obvs) sleevenotes from EC swell 1979's pop gem. Accidents Will Happen as piano ballad from Hollywood High, 1978; a heavy metal Goon Squad at Pink Pop in '79; spooky demo of already-spooky Green Shirt; much else. Elephantine! *DE*

KILLING JOKE

Killing Joke

★★★★

Killing Joke

SPINEFARM. LP

A 40th anniversary repress for the west London quartet's influential debut, its scrofulous stew of tribal rhythm, dubwise synthetics and twisted-nerve guitar lending plausibility to apocalyptic rants like Requiem and The Wait. Ideal soundtrack for the fearful Orwellian tenor of then, and indeed now. *KC*

scars
3-CD EXPANDED EDITION
AUTHOR! AUTHOR!

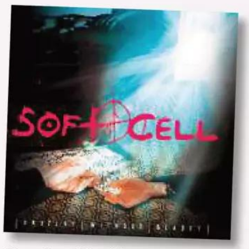
Scars

★★★

Author! Author!

CHERRY RED. CD

The story of how a precocious Edinburgh post-punk quartet evolved from blistering Subway Sect vanguardistas to nu-pop awkward squad is well told on a 3-CD expansion of 1981's album. Very of its time – naïve tunes; atomic alienation lyrics – yet the energy still burns on bonus discs of demos and live shows. *KC*



Soft Cell

★★★

Cruelty Without Beauty

BIG FROCK. CD/DL/LP

2002 reunion expanded to 2-CDs with new remixes, old remixes, live in Leeds set, or a white vinyl EP of the 2020 remixes. A four-minute pop song containing a world of its own, Last Chance is, says Marc Almond, "the natural successor to Say Hello, Wave Goodbye". *JB*

MORE SPECIALS

The Specials

★★★★

More Specials

2-TONE. LP

Mastered half-speed over two heavy 45 rpm 12-inch discs, The Specials' 1980 swansong finds them at a crossroads, as ska-punk gives way to something deeper, stranger and dubbier, joint peaks being the claustrophobic, doom-laden Stereotypes and International Jet Set. If only the centre had held. *IH*

ORCHESTRA
BAOBAB
Specialist in all styles

Orchestra Baobab

★★★

Specialist In All Styles

WORLD CIRCUIT. LP

In 2002, when the heroes of Senegal's post-independence scene reformed after 20 years, it was clear their Cuban-influenced big band sound had lost none of its heft, and the languid guitar or sax solos on Bul Ma Miin or Dée Moo Wóor delighted still. They celebrate their 50th anniversary with its vinyl debut. *JB*

this is fame 1964-1968

Various

★★★★

This Is Fame 1964-1968

KENT SOUL. CD/DL

Covering the period Rick Hall's Fame studio in Muscle Shoals was at the centre of Southern soul, as the two dozen tracks here reveal. Clarence Carter, Jimmy Hughes, James Barnett, Otis Clay delight, but the Dan Penn/Spooner Oldham songs and the house band are every bit as stellar. Inspiring. *GB*

RATINGS & FORMATS

Your guide to the month's best music is now even more definitive with our handy format guide.

CD COMPACT DISC **DL** DOWNLOAD **ST** STREAMING **LP** VINYL
MC CASSETTE **DVD** DIGITAL VIDEO DISC **C** IN CINEMAS **BR** BLU-RAY

★★★★★ MOJO CLASSIC
★★★★ EXCELLENT
★★★ GOOD
★★ DISAPPOINTING
★ BEST AVOIDED
☆ DEPLORABLE

Deep Space Three: Man Or Astro-Man? (from left) Robert Del Bueno (top), Brian Causey and Brian Teasley, ready to lift-off.

Chris T Oliver

CREDITS

Tracks: Taxidermist Surf / Invasion Of The Dragonmen / Nitrous Burn Out / Clean Up On Aisle #9 (Turn Up The Monitors) / Journey To The Stars / Cowboy Playing Dead / Illidium Q-36 / Sadie Hawkins Atom Bomb / The Human Calculator / Organ Smash / Cattle Drive / Escape Through The Air Vent / Rudy's Lounge / Mermaid Love / Eric Estrotica / Alien Visitors

Personnel: Star Crunch (Causley)/ (guitar, laserguns, Q-Tips and rare obligatory vocals)/ Dr. Deleto & His Invisible Vaportron (Goodwin) (bass, sterilized rhythm guitar, etc.)/ Coco, The Electronic Monkey Wizard (Del Bueno) (alternate universe bass, percussion, etc.)/ Birdstuff (Teasley) (hi-hat)/ Grand Master Useless (unknown) (keys, bass)/ John Agar.

Producer: Jim Marrer / Birdstuff

Released: spring '93

Recorded: Zero Return Studio, Alabama

Chart peak: n/a

Available: Estrus album

Intergalactic Shock

This month's escapee from rock's tomb of obscurity: space-surf-rock with samples from Alabama.

Man Or Astro-Man?

Is It… Man Or Astro-Man?

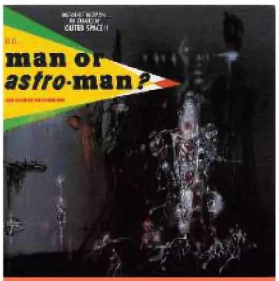
ESTRUS, 1993

NO COLLEGE in Alabama has graduated more astronauts than Auburn University. A two-hour drive to the west is Birmingham, Earth-birthplace of space jazz visionary Sun Ra, who, of course, claimed to be from Saturn. Carry on north and you reach Huntsville and the Marshall Space Flight Centre, where the Saturn rockets for the Apollo moon landings were developed. All these places resonate in the story of space-obsessed surf punks Man Or Astro-Man?

Guitarist Brian Causey, drummer Brian Teasley and bass/electronics specialist Robert Del Bueno were friends at Auburn, and shared a particular outlook in the early '90s. "We sort of hated what you'd call the modern alternative music back then," says Teasley. "You had these overly sincere bands, most of the lyrics were about not having a good childhood or your dad not watching you play a baseball game when you were a kid… hearing Pearl Jam's Jeremy, Alice In Chains, sub-Nirvana grunge, Live or Everclear, we started a band to try and not be that!"

Though they'd grown up on punk rock, hardcore and post-punk, Teasley had an epiphany in his parents' attic, when he came upon records by The Ventures and Link Wray. "This cool instrumental stuff sounded kinda punk," he says, "We were like, we could do instrumental music in this vein and *not* have to sing about how much our girlfriends don't like us. And we didn't want to have that thing of, 'that's the audience and we're these important people playing music'. That was the inception of us using, whatever you call it, retro-'60s-based surf music as a platform for all the things we wanted to do. It pretty immediately made sense to everyone."

Other obsessions fed into the mix. The self-confessed nerds' love of vintage sci-fi, from The Twilight Zone and The Outer Limits to Quatermass, Doctor Who and lashings of warped space celluloid, was one (they got their name via the poster for 1960 Japanese supernatural murder drama The Human Vapor). Sample-based albums *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts* by Byrne and Eno, De La Soul's *3 Feet High And Rising* and The Jazz Butcher's *Big Planet Scarey Planet* – particularly its song Do The Bubonic Plague – dovetailed neatly, as did the Butthole Surfers' dedication to perversity and obscurantism. Teasley's film studies and Causey and Del Bueno's industrial design classes made inevitable, perhaps, the wholesale sampling of film and TV dialogue and effects, and, later, the building of the Tesla coils and satellite dishes that would crowd their manic and adrenalised stage show.


man or astro-man?

"I wrote John Peel a note saying, 'Do not play this record.'"
BRIAN TEASLEY

In December 1992, accompanied by bassist and rhythm guitarist Jeff Goodwin, they went to producer Jim Marrer's kudzu weed-covered Zero Return Studio, located down a dirt road in rural Wetumpka. "We did it on a Scully 4-track, recorded live in three days starting on Friday night and ending on Sunday, with hardly any overdubs," says Teasley. "That made the process fast and easy. We were coming at it with this real naïve innocence, hoping the energy transferred onto the record."

With the group adopting marooned-on-Earth alien alter-egos (*see Credits box*), their debut LP truly did. Laying out a retro-future vision of the cosmic beyond and the atom age with added B-movie movie thrills and spills, the driving guitar twang and slash of the instrumental forefathers was re-charged with punk attack and countdown drums. Oddly visual tracks assail the senses and hurtle by as if heard in some infernal astro-training centrifuge: terrestrial hot-rodder Nitrous Burn Out piles on the G-force and snarls to the point of explosion; Cowboy Playing Dead is a ghost ride for gauchos caught in a nuclear bomb test; elongated, paranoid closer Alien Visitors pictures the Earth as prey to unknown intruders. Samples from sources including Death Race 2000, Plan 9 From Outer Space and the 1974 story book/record Spider Man: Invasion Of The Dragon Men were collected from film libraries, the Something Weird Video catalogue and beyond, and were triggered live using an AKAI S1000. "Sometimes you'd watch films for 20 hours to get 30 seconds of usable stuff," says the drummer, who also recalls Marrer keeping them hopped up on super-sugary Southern sweet tea, and a snake crawling into Del Bueno's sleeping bag one night. "But that one perfect line made it all worthwhile."

As well as Marrer, he doffs the space helmet to other "elder statesmen of the universe looking out for us." One was designer Art Chantry, who fixed it for them to use cover art by legendary sci-fi illustrator Richard Powers, and who put an appeal for a Theremin on the record's sleevenote. Teasley admits that they were consciously aware of neither at the time: the Theremin would later become a big part of their sound. He also recalls sending 1992's debut 7-inch Possession By Remote Control to John Peel: "I wrote him a note saying, 'Whatever you do, do not play this record.' Kind of a dumb idea, but we were 19." In December 1993, the group did the first of six Peel sessions.

Occupying the phantom zone where The Spotnicks, The Residents and Devo collide, their debut was released in spring 1993. The group then began touring, and recording, in earnest, and did not let up (Teasley says one year the globe-traversing unit spent 344 days either gigging or in the studio). Pausing operations in 2001, they returned in 2006 at a less frantic pace, and are currently recording a new LP. Today Teasley also runs the Saturn venue in Birmingham – in tribute to local hero Sun Ra and Teasley's grandfather, who worked on the Saturn rockets at the Marshall Space Flight Centre. "We were just amazed that we got to do what we got to do," he says, "and the fact we're making a new record blows my mind. It all comes around in strange ways."

Ian Harrison

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Always your man: poet and perfectionist Leonard Cohen, on tour in Amsterdam, April 1972.

Leonard Cohen

Towers of song. By **Sylvie Simmons**.

LEONARD COHEN doesn't have that big a discography for someone who made music over a five-decade span: 15 studio albums, though he made up for a near-decade gap after *The Future* (1992) by recording four albums in the last five years of his life (the last, 2019's *Thanks For The Dance*, released posthumously.) It wasn't that he couldn't write a song, he told me as his biographer. But he was a perfectionist – which made for 15 essential albums.

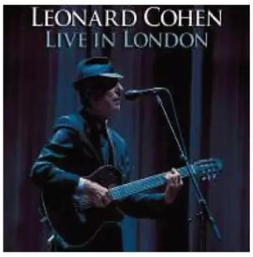
Cohen was a relatively old 33 when his first album came out in 1967, when the mantra was to trust no one over 30. Born and raised in Montreal, he'd previously published four books of poetry and two novels. His first collection, Let Us Compare Mythologies (1956), had him hailed as the golden boy of Canadian verse. Other than reciting poems over a jazz combo and a short stint as guitarist in a square-dance country band, he had no background in music. His own compositions were dense and poetic, and it was penury that made him try his hand at songwriting in the '60s. And it was penury that forced him to make that extraordinary comeback in the 2000s when Cohen, in his seventies, discovered that his bank account had been stripped bare by his manager. Previously he had hated touring. This time it energised him to record more albums, so that he could go back on the road.

In the latter years of his life, Cohen – in sharp suit and fedora, like a Rat Pack rabbi – was playing sold-out shows to standing ovations. He earned back his lost money and a whole lot more, and when he died at age 82, with his latest album *You Want It Darker* (Columbia, 2016) at Number 1 in the charts, he was at the top of his game.

"Cohen – in sharp suit and fedora, like a Rat Pack rabbi…"

CAST YOUR VOTES…

This month you chose your Top 10 Leonard Cohen LPs. Next month we want your Bobby Womack Top 10. Send your choices to www.mojo4music.com or email your Top 10 to mojo@bauermedia.co.uk with the subject 'How To Buy Bobby Womack' and we'll print the best comments.



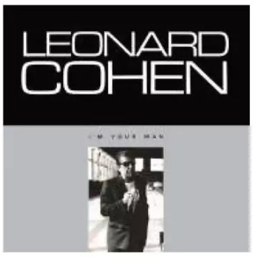
10 Leonard Cohen

Live In London

SONY 2009, £9.52

You Say: "All classics with a great group of players and singers. A tribute to his career." @Mostrowski52, via Twitter

The previous occasion he had been on-stage in London, in the early '90s, a droll Cohen informed the O2 audience at this 2008 gig, "I was 60 years old, just a kid with a crazy dream." There really was nothing like those three-hour-plus shows on the two tours he undertook in the final decade of his life. The charisma, humour, humility and unwavering quality of performances and the church-like hush of the crowds: they were a love fest and so is this, with 26 career-encompassing songs, including Anthem, Tower Of Song, Suzanne and Ain't No Cure For Love. It's better than a best-of album.



4 Leonard Cohen

I'm Your Man

COLUMBIA 1988, £6.02

You say: "Powerful, sinister and perfect." Tom Harding, via Twitter

"I'd never encountered a sound like it – part disco, part folk but with the sex of rock'n'roll." Robert Burke Warren, via Facebook

The album that rebranded Cohen from tortured poet to contemporary hip, though for many North American fans, this was the first album of his they heard. Actually, it's not lacking in depth – see terroristic First We Take Manhattan or AIDS-inspired Ain't No Cure For Love – but they're songs you can sing along with. And Cohen's humour is more overt here: Tower Of Song may reference the Holocaust but everyone laughs at the line, "I was born with the gift of a golden voice." Other classics: the title track and Take This Waltz, his translation of a Lorca poem.

Getty (2)

LEONARD COHEN
DEATH OF A LADIES' MAN

9 Leonard Cohen Death Of A Ladies' Man

COLUMBIA 1977, £4.39

You say: "Death, love, the end of the '70s in a smog of cocaine and every kind of excess. One of the most honest albums, like Lou Reed's *Berlin*." Palo Vites, via Facebook

It was one of the strangest pairings in popular music. Phil Spector, writer/producer of teenage pop epics, and Cohen, a poet who liked his songs like he liked his rooms: uncluttered. But they shared a manager and, also, problems with drink and women. This bombastic album is quite unlike any of Cohen's earlier LPs. He hated it at the time – particularly his voice – though he warmed to it later, as did many fans, for its honesty (Memories; Don't Go Home With Your Hard-On) and tenderness (Paper-Thin Hotel). How did the two principals' talents mix? They didn't. That's what makes it so interesting.

LEONARD COHEN
VARIOUS POSITIONS

8 Leonard Cohen Various Positions

PASSPORT 1984, £4.85

You say: "I think of it as his *Time Out Of Mind*, the album that heralded the return of his songwriting mojo and the birth of a distinctive new phase." Neil Herrington, via Twitter

When Cohen played his seventh album to his label boss, he was told: "Leonard, we know you're great, we just don't know if you're any good." Columbia initially declined to release the LP – a bridge between Cohen's guitar ballads and the synthesizers and anthems that followed – in the US, where it emerged on the tiny Passport label. Incredible, given it contains such classics as If It Be Your Will, Dance Me To The End and Hallelujah, the last being Cohen's closest thing to a sacred text, covered by Bob Dylan, Jeff Buckley, John Cale, and TV talent show singers to the point where he suggested a moratorium.

LEONARD COHEN
THE FUTURE

7 Leonard Cohen The Future

COLUMBIA 1992, £5.49

You say: "No album by anyone has better lyrics. It's like Dante with synths." Judah Warsky, via Twitter

"Where killers in high places say their prayers out loud"; "It looks like freedom but it feels like death"; "I've seen the future, it is murder." Since November 2016, when Donald Trump won the US presidential election on the day after Cohen died, this album has been seen by many as prophetic. It is powerful and direct, looking darkness right in the eye; the Oliver Stone movie Natural Born Killers used a couple of songs on its soundtrack, while it also includes one of Cohen's greatest songs, 15 years in the making: Anthem. On a dark album even for this singer, it was all about finding the light.

LEONARD COHEN TEN NEW SONGS

6 Leonard Cohen Ten New Songs

COLUMBIA 2001, £4.72

You say: "It represents a certain acceptance of human tragedy and calmness with it. Of course as always, the melancholy…" Baris Yorumez, via Twitter

Cohen's first album in nine years was his second fully joint effort, this time with his backing singer Sharon Robinson. Recorded in their respective home studios, it's entirely unbombastic, Cohen's voice is soft, smoky and low. The whole thing is a beauty – soulful, reflective and elegiac on songs including Alexandra Leaving, You Have Loved Enough, and stunning A Thousand Kisses Deep. Cohen was by no means a natural collaborator, but having left the music business for the "religion business", spending nearly six years as a Buddhist monk then moving onto Advaita, it was good to work with a friend.

LEONARD COHEN
YOU WANT IT DARKER

5 Leonard Cohen You Want It Darker

COLUMBIA 2016, £7.85

You say: "As fine a denouement as an artist could hope for." Sean Hathwell, via Facebook

The comeback tours had put wind in Cohen's sails. This, by far his most heavily weighted work, would be the last during his lifetime. Cohen was housebound due to a crumbling spine, then cancer. Confined to a medical chair, *You Want It Darker* was recorded in his living room, his son Adam producing. At times its shadows are deep, particularly on the title track, featuring the male cantor and choir from his Montreal synagogue. But there is also light (Traveling Light) and beauty (If I Didn't Have Your Love) and, best of all, the beauteous lament Treaty, a song that took 20 years to complete.

LEONARD COHEN
SONGS FROM A ROOM

3 Leonard Cohen Songs From A Room

COLUMBIA 1969, £4.85

You say: "A series of elegies that queried his ambitions in the wake of the great change of the '60s." EM Lyng, via Twitter

"As a 14-year-old the combo of poetry, melody and lonesome vocals just hit the head and heart at the same time." Wayne Gillespie, via Facebook

Cohen hated recording his first album so much he was reluctant to make a second. Joni Mitchell urged him to come to LA and work with David Crosby; not a success. But in LA he met Bob Johnston, Dylan's maverick producer, who persuaded Cohen to go to Nashville and record with him and stellar sessioneers including Charlie Daniels. It couldn't be any less Nashvegas: its out-and-out classics Story Of Isaac, Seems So Long Ago, Nancy, The Partisan and Bird On The Wire are stark and intimate.

LEONARD COHEN
SONGS OF LOVE AND HATE

2 Leonard Cohen Songs Of Love And Hate

COLUMBIA 1971, £5.98

You say: "Equal parts threatening and divine." James Laming, via Facebook

"I just can't see any possible way it could be improved on." Michael Daly, via Twitter

Some of Cohen's most beautiful songs are on his compelling, intense third album: Famous Blue Raincoat, a letter written to a rival and friend at four in the morning, and Joan Of Arc, a song of religion, war and sex. There's also some of his most bleak and savage transmissions: Avalanche, with its hunchback protagonist; snarling, skewed-country singalong Diamonds In The Mine; and the self-loathing Dress Rehearsal Rag, of which he said, "I didn't write that song, I suffered it." So much pain in so many different forms. A masterpiece, again recorded with Bob Johnston and his Nashville band.

SONGS OF
LEONARD COHEN

1 Leonard Cohen Songs Of Leonard Cohen

COLUMBIA 1967, £4.85

You say: "Because almost every song is a heavyweight in his catalogue." James Travis, via Twitter

"I've never heard an album so totally compelling." John Etherington, via Facebook

Released in the winter of the Summer of Love, Cohen's debut seemed to come out of nowhere. The only point of familiarity was Suzanne, the opening song, which Judy Collins (and Noel Harrison) had already recorded. With Cohen's lyrics being so literary and his narratives so full of enigmatic characters, there were Dylan comparisons. But Cohen, with his sombre, hypnotic voice – which producer John Simon tried to prettify with elaborate arrangements – and flamenco-like folk guitar was obviously a unique artist. Ten songs, each of them great: So Long, Marianne; Sisters Of Mercy; Hey, That's No Way To Say Goodbye. Utterly haunting.

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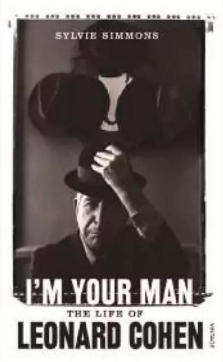

With Cohen, poetry went hand-in-hand with song. There's around a dozen collections in print – some post-1968 also feature lyrics. A good start: Stranger Music: Selected Poems And Songs (McClelland & Stewart, 1993); Book Of Longing (Ecco, 2007) and The Flame (Canongate, 2018). There have been several Cohen biographies: this writer's, written with his support, is I'm Your Man: The Life Of Leonard Cohen (Vintage, 2012; updated 2017). No truly essential documentary movies, but check out the 1965 Canadian film Ladies And Gentlemen… Mr Leonard Cohen (YouTube or DVD Collectors box, £23.45) and 1970's Leonard Cohen At The Isle Of Wight (Sony Legacy, 2009, £10.21).

About to erupt: Jimi Hendrix, relaxing on Maui, 1970; (top right) on-stage at the foot of Haleakala.

Unforgettable fire

A new film lays bare the chaos of Jimi's 1970 Hawaii visit. With rare audio of two sets on a volcano. By **Grayson Haver Currin**.

Music, Money, Madness… Jimi Hendrix In Maui

★★★★

LEGACY RECORDINGS. CD+DVD

EVEN AN inspired novelist with a penchant for rock'n'roll fanfiction might struggle to muster circumstances as tragic as those surrounding this new documentary by John McDermott.

In July 1970, Jimi Hendrix – just months shy of his 28th birthday and a year removed from his Monday morning Woodstock triumph – decamped to a rented Episcopalian charm school in Maui for several weeks of deserved tropical vacation. He'd toured that year with his new Cry Of Love trio while struggling to meet the skyrocketing construction costs of his dreamland Electric Lady studio, still not open back in New York. But in Hawaii, his hardline manager, Michael Jeffery, hoodwinked Hendrix into participating in Rainbow Bridge, a demented and discursive hodgepodge of counterculture signifiers like philosophical rumination, free love, and… Cry Of Love playing for an audience of slack-jawed and long-haired locals at the base of a breathtaking volcano, Haleakala.

The concert was a mess, ravaged by wind. The film was a directionless flop, assailed by critics. And the top-billed star, Hendrix, was dead less than two months after his dual sets, making Rainbow Bridge a maddening footnote to a marvellous and stunted career.

Despite this inevitably unhappy ending, Music, Money, Madness… is occasionally hilarious. It examines the film's conceptual and organisational miscues and, in the process, uncovers some truly glorious footage of Hendrix in front of Haleakala, the audio of which arrives at last in an accompanying box set. Director John McDermott highlights the humour that's so common when a few hangers-on and pied pipers bite off more tabs than their brains can process. With Music, Money, Madness… he lands somewhere between Spinal Tap, Cheech & Chong, and recent surveys of the Fyre Festival fiasco. You hate that Hendrix found himself in this fix, even if his trio managed two radiant sets; you love to see the organisers get their subtle comeuppance, even if a half-century later.

Rainbow Bridge sprang from the addled imagination of Chuck Wein, a Harvard graduate who famously introduced Andy Warhol to Edie Sedgwick and then became a perennial hippy huckster. Intended as a transcendent response to the brooding Easy Rider, only built around surfing and "high-energy centres" like volcanoes and shore-lines, Rainbow Bridge soon morphed into a formless collage of feel-good totems: "Yoga, pure food, some partying, some good drugs," as Wein puts it in Music, Money, Madness, as if still high on his own supply of pride. Most everything his acolytes say is glittering fool's gold – how Hendrix's set summoned a flying saucer or an unfailing insistence that it was a successful "vibratory colour sound experiment". Some even maintain that the original Rainbow Bridge is a brilliant feat, not an occasionally intriguing gallimaufry of heavily edited new age gimmickry.

The true hero to emerge here is Billy Cox, as bemused as he is amused when he provides a tour of the concert setting, or the worries he and Hendrix shared that the volcano might erupt. Cox is avuncular and warm, sharing his glory days with gentle candour and the same smile he had on stage in 1970. "One of the greatest concerts I ever did," he says at one point – another musician, then as now, finding their own redemption and value in others' unfortunate attempts to exploit their skills.

> "One of the greatest concerts I ever did."
>
> BILLY COX, CRY OF LOVE BASSIST

Live in Maui

WHAT WE'VE LEARNT

- Mitch Mitchell re-recorded his drum parts from the sets in the studio, since wind beset the original recordings.
- Hendrix dedicates Foxy Lady to Pat Hartley, who had appeared in a Warhol Screen Test and became his "co-star" in Rainbow Bridge. She now runs her own film company.
- During Rainbow Bridge, Hendrix assassinates Wein, then delivers a speech as the New Age President Of The United States.
- Search online for the promotional video of Hendrix for the documentary. The Voodoo Child (Slight Return) footage is a gift.

Daniel Teheney Authentic Hendrix LLD (3)

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Radiophonic Times: Caroline Catz imagines Delia Derbyshire's workshop.

Best Before Death: A Film About Bill Drummond

★★★

Dir: Paul Duane

ANTI WORLDS RELEASING. **BR/DVD**

Ex-KLF art maverick shadowed on The 25 Paintings world tour.

In 2014, Bill Drummond initiated a 12-year project, in which annually he'd spend two weeks in a different city to act out the 25 commands in his titular paintings. Paul Duane's 90-minute film follows him to early stops at Kolkata, India, and Lexington, North Carolina, where Drummond potters around constructing a bed frame, baking cakes for spuriously chosen strangers, and generally causing confusion – not least with the director, as he tetchily argues about access parameters, and refuses to discuss many aspects of the project (or his pop career). The queasiest moment arrives when a young Indian woman announces she's found him on Wikipedia. Drummond tenses up, transparently fearing that this bewildered native of one of the world's poorest countries is about to ask him why The KLF burnt £1million in 1994. From there on, his far-flung, nutty pursuits resemble an elaborate, if amusing, ploy to escape the infamy of that career-defining action.

Andrew Perry

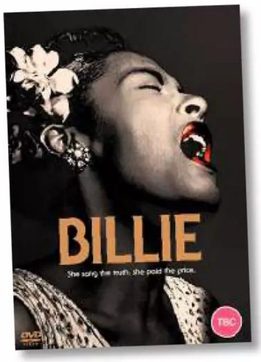
Billie

★★★★★

Dir. James Erkskine

ALTITUDE. **C/DVD/ST**

The definitive Billie Holiday documentary.



Journalist Linda Lipnack Kuehl hadn't finished her Billie Holiday biography when she mysteriously killed herself in 1978, leaving behind 200 hours of audio interviews, with Holiday confidantes such as Count Basie, Tony Bennett and Billy Eckstine providing revealing memories. Those tapes are seamlessly blended with Holiday footage from film, TV and radio, making director James Erskine's documentary the most intimate, often brutal – and ultimately truest – depiction of the great Lady Day, whose epic self-destruction and masochistic romances were inversely mirrored by a vocal gift of unequalled honesty, as well as her status as a pioneer of anti-racist protest. Kuehl's own life and death are recounted by her sister, and a parallel tale emerges of two talented women struggling against the patriarchy.

Michael Simmons

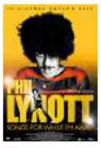
Phil Lynott: Songs For While I'm Away

★★★★

Dir: Emer Reynolds

BREAK OUT/EAGLE ROCK. **BR/DVD/ST**

Dublin's great rock poet recalled in all his complexity.



A probing character study partly told in Lynott's own words, Reynolds' talking heads and archive footage film touches most when Lynott's daughters Sarah and Cathleen discuss the songs their doting, if often absent, father wrote for them. Elsewhere, Thin Lizzy's Eric Bell testifies that it was after Chas Chandler almost threw a somewhat ineffectual Lizzy off a 1972 Slade support tour that Lynott began to reinvent himself as the cocksure frontman depicted in 1973's The Rocker, but this book shows Lynott forever conflicted: a guilt-ridden romantic whose songs detailed his flaws and insecurities as well as his conquests. The film's occasional recourse to stylised, rock-doc filler footage – rotating tape machine etc – leaks some energy, but as Scott Gorham, U2's Adam Clayton, and Phil's ex-wife Caroline Taraskevics weigh in, the great man's magnetism and uniqueness come across.

James McNair

Creem: America's Only Rock'n'Roll Magazine

★★★★

Dir: Scott Crawford

GREENWICH ENTERTAINMENT. **DVD/ST**

Tale of the birth and glory years of a great US rock mag.

In a decrepit crash-pad in downtown Detroit, 1970, head shop owner-turned-magazine publisher Barry Kramer introduces his staff. Very young, they look like stoners or rock musicians, or both. Women too, a rarity back then. Kramer paid each of them, editor Dave Marsh included, $5 a week to put out a magazine that various celebs tell us was life-changing. The words "America's only rock'n'roll magazine" on the cover were part swagger – a 'fuck you' to Rolling Stone – but also part truth. Creem was all about rock: locals like MC5, Stooges, Alice, Nugent, then the NY punk scene and beyond, all treated with love and utter irreverence. With so many stories, so little time and too many talking heads, the film tends to focus on Kramer, Marsh and writer Lester Bangs, with great insights from ex-writers Cameron Crowe and Jaan Uhelszki and Kramer's widow Connie. Highly watchable, it leaves you wanting more.

Sylvie Simmon

Delia Derbyshire: The Myths And Legendary Tapes

★★★★★

Dir: Caroline Catz

BFI PLAYER. **ST**

Drama-doc on Radiophonic Workshop pioneer.

Delia Derbyshire's music was made for a film this multilayered and magical. Writer/director/actor Caroline Catz takes Derbyshire's astonishing archive – including 267 tapes and journals discovered at her childhood home in 2011 – and weaves in other disparate elements to celebrate her life honestly, but enchantingly. She dramatises key incidents, playing the high-beehived, canny Derbyshire herself (the scene when she realises the Dr Who theme in electronics is wittily done). Interviews with old colleagues like Brian Hodgson and White Noise's David Vorhaus remind you of the composer's humanity, punctuated by Derbyshire's infectious laughter. Cosey Fanni Tutti provides the soundtrack, manipulating Derbyshire's old tapes: the effect is a delicious duet with a delightful ghost. Production designer Felicity Hickson (In Fabric; The Martian) wraps it all up in unnerving beauty.

Jude Rogers

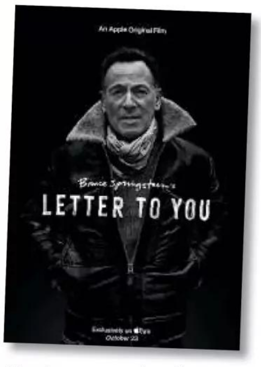
Bruce Springsteen's Letter To You

★★★

Dir: Thom Zimny

APPLE TV+. **ST**

The film of the album, some drinking and Bruce's cousin.



Let's get the icky business done with: this film is a feature-length advert for the new Springsteen album, and a promotional tool for Apple's subscription TV service, which is the only means to watch it. Yet diehard Boss fans will enjoy the emotional undercurrents resonating through the grainy monochrome 86 minutes. Put together by Thom Zimny, the film documents the album sessions with the E Street Band, amplifying its themes – camaraderie, memory, mortality – with archive footage and soliloquies from Springsteen loaded with perorational aura. More so than the awkward scenes of band members downing shots with their leader, Springsteen magic occurs post-credits, as he and cousin Frank jam Baby I, a song written in 1966 with his first band, The Castiles. It was Frank who taught the teenage Bruce a few basic guitar chords – and the look on Springsteen's face says that if this letter is to anyone, it's him.

Keith Cameron

Crock Of Gold: A Few Rounds With Shane MacGowan

★★★★

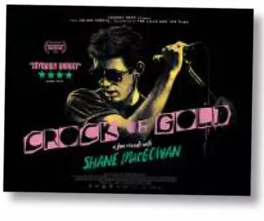
Dir: Julien Temple

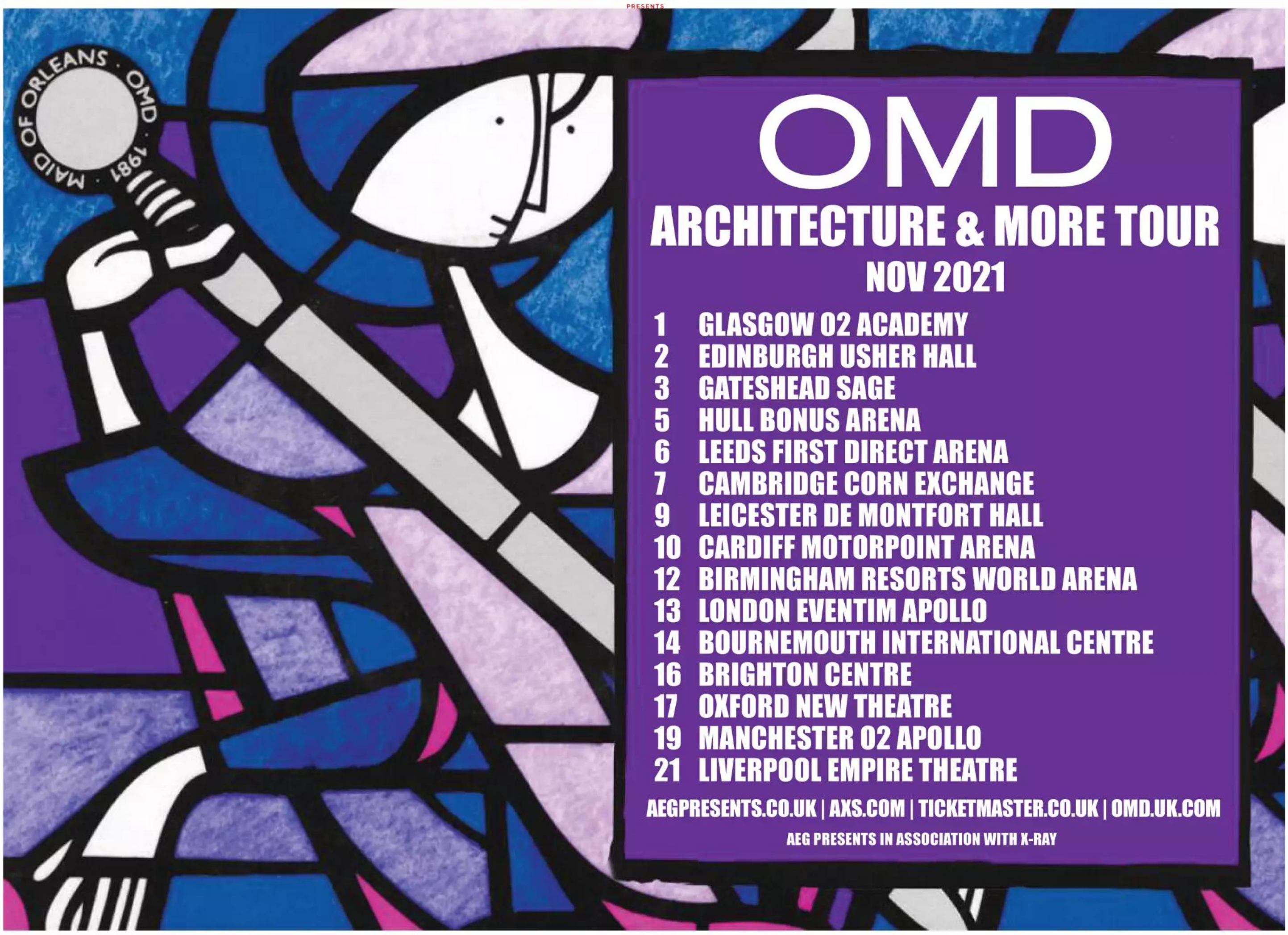
ALTITUDE FILMS. **C/ST**

A man you don't meet every day: the chaotic life and times of the Pogues' singer.

Storybook animations of Irish legends open Julien Temple's documentary portrait of Shane MacGowan, but happily, Crock Of Gold isn't a sycophantic burnishing of its subject's grubby myth. Johnny Depp is one of the friends filmed "interviewing" the debilitated MacGowan, but the Hollywood star's rebellious posturing is at odds with the sad, strange story that unfolds, stumbling through a lost Ireland, an establishment public school and the London punk scene. Addiction, mental health, music industry voracity and – in an interview with MacGowan's father – the perils of listening to Creedence Clearwater Revival are addressed, rich archive footage and stylistically varied animations (The Beano, Robert Crumb) driving Temple's visually dense narrative. Friends and family insist MacGowan is driven by a life force, not a death wish; Crock Of Gold tells both sides of that complicated story.

Victoria Segal





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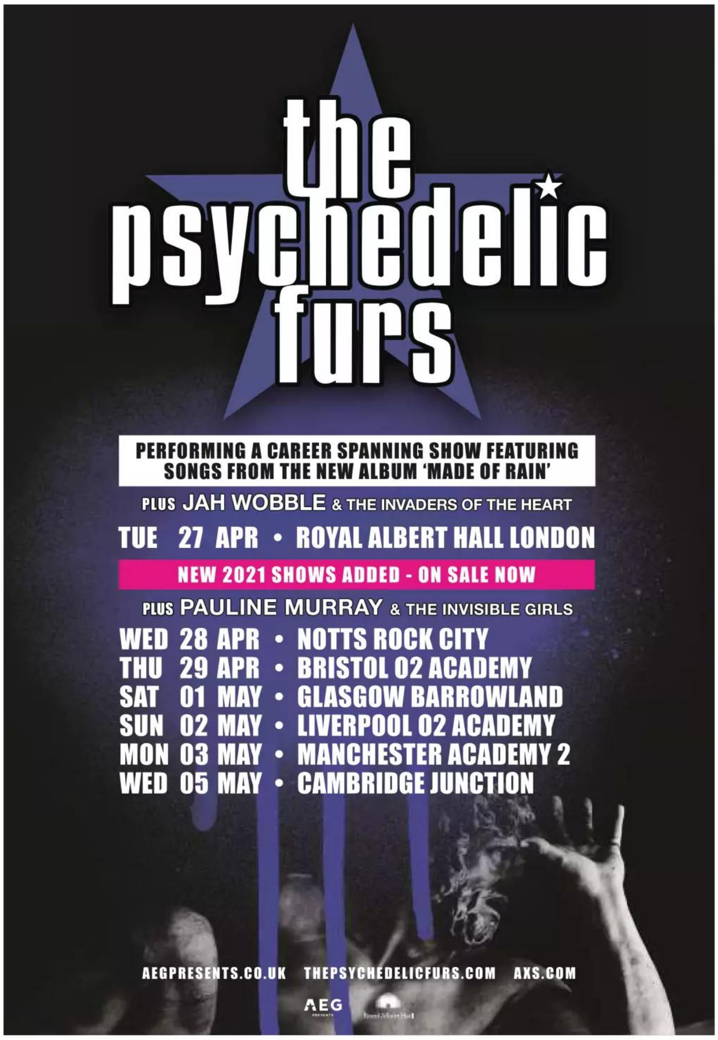

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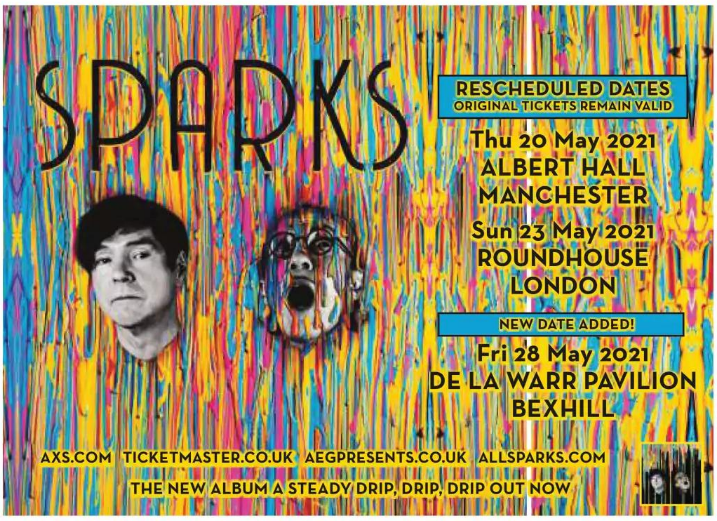

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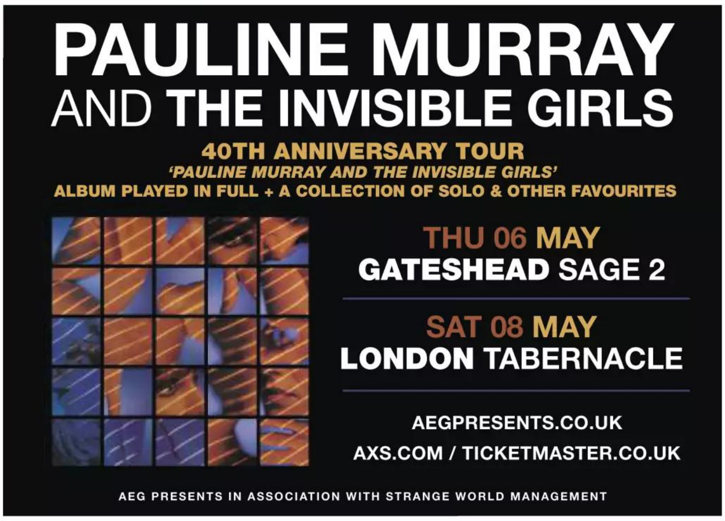

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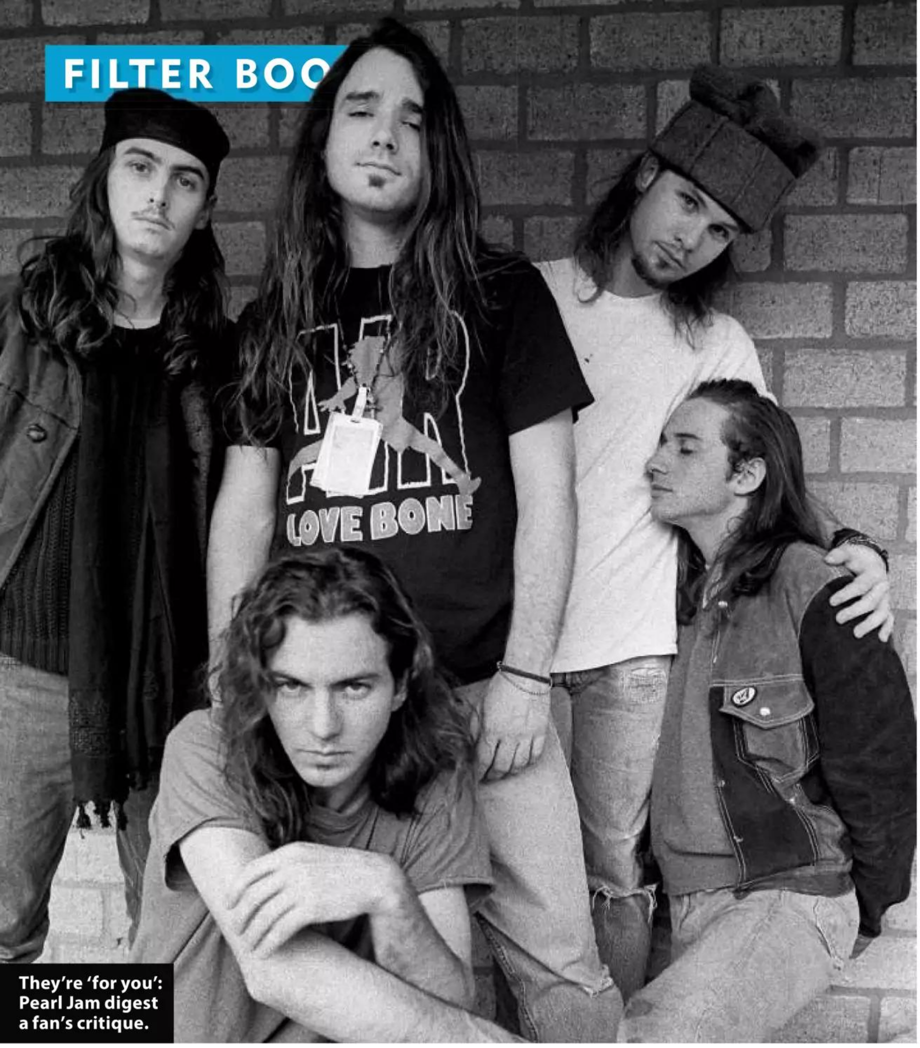
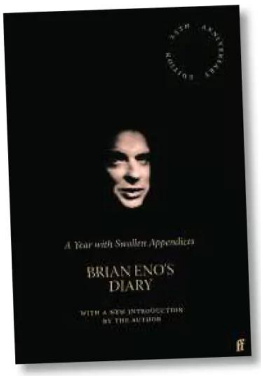


They're 'for you': Pearl Jam digest a fan's critique.

Getty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A Year With Swollen Appendices: Brain Eno's Diary

★★★★

Brian Eno

FABER & FABER. £20

1995 original updated for 25th anniversary, with spiky new introduction.

Brian Eno, self-proclaimed 'clever chap with words', likes to tell us important things. Living, by his own admission, a privileged life, in which someone else is exercised by boring stuff like paying the bills, Eno has plenty of time to be Eno. He's an academic manqué, e-mailing his friend the American polymath Stewart Brand, and musing on politics, fashion, identity, war, creativity and more in his Appendices. Of course, he's constantly in demand in the studio too – happy and charmed by Bono's (over) enthusiasms; voicing a few reservations about Bowie's *Outside*, pre-release – but the background noise is of a man keen to show that music is just one thing he does. There's a short, but superb introduction to the new edition, attacking the toxic populism of some of today's leaders, and with a list of new words humankind has invented in 25 short years. It's an open-ended, unfinished departure, in keeping with the man and his art.

David Buckley

Fast Forward: Confessions Of A Post-Punk Percussionist, Volume 2

★★★★

Stephen Morris

CONSTABLE. £20

Uproarious adventures during the New Order years.

STEPHEN MORRIS
FAST FORWARD

The first volume of Stephen Morris's memoirs, Record Play Pause, was a madcap delight, the tale of a Northern scamp on his uppers (in all senses), who somehow became the pulsing beat of one of the most mythologised band of all time. Fast Forward propels us from Joy Division to New Order, and once again Morris's loquacious, daft wit makes this old yarn feel freshly alive ("a tragedy of epic proportions [won't] dissuade us from following our haphazard path of rock greatness. Oh no!") Fans will love the detail, from Sumner microdosing before making Temptation, to how "frosty" the band were with each other at the premiere of Control. Honest accounts of his dad's death and his daughter Tilly's illness are also rendered beautifully, reminding us of the ordinary worlds behind pop, and how precious they are.

Jude Rogers

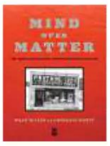
Mind Over Matter: The Myths And Mysteries Of Detroit's Fortune Records

★★★★★

Billy Miller And Michael Hurtt

KICKS BOOKS. £55

Motor City shakedown: the strange, epic story of a legendary R&B imprint.



If Motown was "The Sound of Young America", Fortune Records, founded in 1946, was the sound of everything else in post-war Detroit: blues, country, rockabilly and especially the sublime vocal-group heaven epitomised by Nolan Strong And The Diablos on their 1954 ladies' choice The Wind. Run in mom-and-pop fashion by Jack and Devora Brown, a white couple, Fortune also unleashed the wild proto-soul of Andre Williams (Bacon Fat) and Nathaniel Meyer (Village Of Love) to national chart effect, but mostly specialised in collectors' catnip: The Royal Jokers, doo wop mystery group The Delteens, bluesman Doctor Ross (his original Cat's Squirrel), and garage-worthy girl group The Utopians – celebrated by the late Miller (a co-founder of Norton Records) and Hurtt with anecdotal and illustrated relish in this 552-page account. A true believer's foreword by Lenny Kaye and testimonials from Jonathan Richman, Dion and Lou Reed ("If I could really sing, I'd be Nolan Strong") seal the deal.

David Fricke

Do You Feel Like I Do: A Memoir

★★★★

Peter Frampton With Alan Light

HACHETTE. £22.99

Beckenham-born blond bombshell of '70s rock tells all.

Do You Feel Like I Do!
Peter Frampton

In 1980, Peter Frampton believed his favourite guitar had been destroyed in a plane crash. It reappeared 32 years later; a metaphor, he thinks, for his seesawing career. Frampton was a pop pin-up with The Herd and a guitar hero with Humble Pie, before 1976's *Frampton Comes Alive!* sold eight million copies in a year. Suddenly, his golden halo-framed face was everywhere – and the only way was down. Frampton sounds rueful, but never bitter, even when describing how his ex-manager Dee Anthony robbed him blind. But it's hard not to wince; in 1996, Pete Townshend asks if he'll replace him in The Who. "It made no sense," writes Frampton, "but my career was in the toilet." Townshend changes his mind but forgets to tell Peter. He still sounds chipper despite being diagnosed with the muscle disorder IBM and forced into early retirement. "I've been to the moon and back," says Frampton, concluding this gentle, warm-hearted memoir.

Mark Blake

The Seekers: Meetings With Remarkable Musicians

John Densmore

★★★★

HACHETTE. £20

A rock star pays humble tribute to his teachers.

john densmore
THE SEEKERS

While visiting a recording session, The Doors' drummer John Densmore went to say hello to the percussionists. "I'm going to hang with my people," he told the engineer. But Densmore's "people" go beyond fellow rhythm keepers. Even as rock elder, he continues to seek wisdom about the creative process. In this inspiring collection of essays, he explains insights gratefully gleaned from Ravi Shankar, Bob Marley, Lou Reed, Patti Smith, Willie Nelson, fellow Doors Jim Morrison and Ray Manzarek, conductor Gustavo Dudamel, percussionist Airto Moreira and others. A formative influence was John Coltrane drummer Elvin Jones, for whom the rock star carried cymbals as a gesture of gratitude. He even recounts the rueful lesson that heroes are flawed, after a disastrous gig with a moody Van Morrison. Through it all he returns to themes such as the importance of listening and silence. "Without silence, we wouldn't know sound."

Michael Simmons

Not For You: Pearl Jam & The Present Tense

★★★★

Ronen Givony

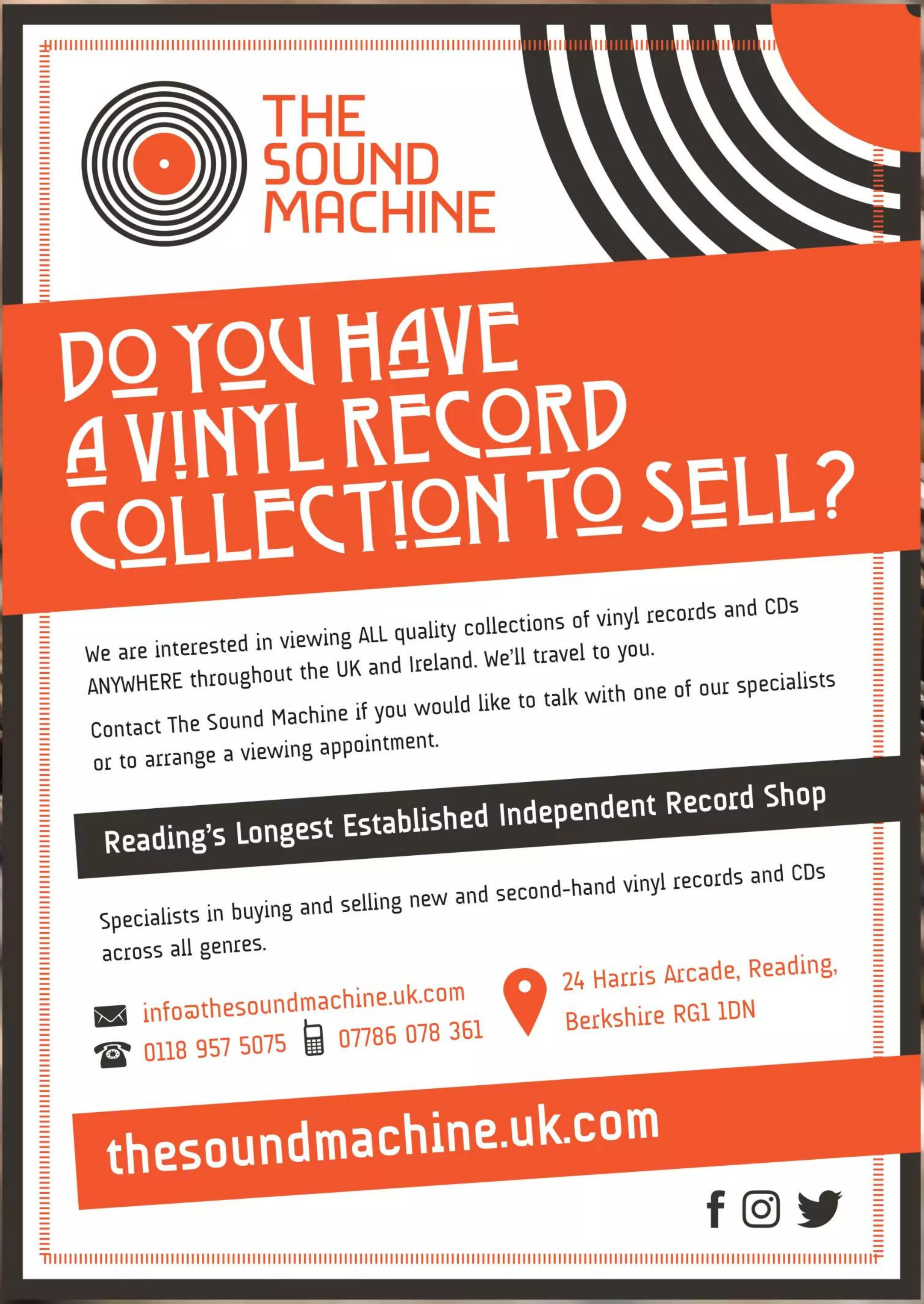
BLOOMSBURY. £17.99

A fan's (sometimes very) critical history of Pearl Jam's 30 years.

Ronen Givony confesses he's "only" seen Pearl Jam 57 times: a number that will seem ridiculous both to those puzzled by the band's mass appeal, and the ultras who probably regard 100 as the minimum qualification for writing a definitive career-spanning account. Givony's obsessive immersion began at an impressionable age – aged 15, he was among 950,378 Americans who bought *Vs* in its first week – and it amply compensates for having never met or interviewed the band. Indeed, his embedded fan's perspective affords license to lambast his heroes for multiple crimes, be it Stone Gossard's hat on a 1993 magazine cover, the pre-PJ Eddie Vedder's Red Hot Chili Peppers fixation, or 2009's *Backspacer* ("an insult to everything the band once stood for"). Givony trenchantly argues that Pearl Jam haven't made a great album since 1998. Yet his sometimes contentious analysis is always delivered with a wry snap and bolstered by diligent socio-cultural contextualisation, pinpointing one aspect of the band's appeal; they're more 'for you' than might initially appear to be the case.

Keith Cameron

NOT FOR YOU PEARL JAM AND THE PRESENT TENSE
RONEN GIVONY



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Firestarter: Eddie Van Halen with his self-built 'Frankenstrat' guitar, Lewisham Odeon, 1978.

The Toughest Around

Genius guitar dynamo **Eddie Van Halen** left us on October 6.

VAN HALEN came on-stage like they were shot out of cannon," noted producer Ted Templeman in 1977. He was especially taken with Eddie, a wunderkind "nonchalant in his greatness" who Templeman considered the equal of Miles Davis or Dizzy Gillespie. Van Halen's self-titled 1978 debut packed ground-breaking guitar fireworks that included two-handed tapping and squealing pinch harmonics: you could hear Eddie's *joie de vivre* and fearlessness, his pop sensibility and astonishing way with a riff. Before him, only Hendrix had made such a seismic splash.

Born Edward Lodewijk Van Halen in Amsterdam, the guitarist and his brother Alex emigrated to California in 1962. Mindful of their father Jan's haphazard career as a jazz clarinettist, their mother Eugenia wanted both sons to become concert pianists, so when the family sailed to the US with $15 between them, their treasured piano came too.

Still kids, Eddie and Alex took it in turns to win piano competitions at Long Beach City College, but smitten by The Beatles and The Dave Clark Five, Eddie bought a drum kit with earnings from his paper-round. It was Alex, though, who nailed the drum solo in The Surfaris' Wipe Out while Eddie was out delivering the news. Eddie then switched to Alex's guitar.

Clapton's *Blues Breakers* album with John Mayall was inspirational; ditto the work of Jeff Beck, Jimmy Page, and Jimi Hendrix. But Van Halen never took guitar lessons and soon developed a unique vocabulary. "It sounded like someone could fly," fan and Def Leppard guitarist Phil Collen said of Eruption, Eddie's jaw-dropping instrumental from 1978's debut *Van Halen*. But that was just the start. Witness the how-did-he-do-that opening of Mean Street from 1981's *Fair Warning*, or the solo on 1984's Jump, delivered in the attendant video with a knowing smile.

A tech boffin as well as a virtuoso, Van Halen built his own hybrid 'Frankenstrat' and eventually held three US patents. Gear-heads pored over early kit that seemed to be held together with gaffer-tape, seeking Van Halen's fabled "brown" sound to no avail. It lived in his fingers.

Though primarily a hard rocker, he comped jazz chords on Big Bad Bill (Is Sweet William Now) and improvised acoustic slide on Could This Be Magic. Together with that of Van Halen's original frontman David Lee Roth, his singular genius helped transcend genres. They covered Martha Reeves & The Vandellas, and Michael Jackson and Quincy Jones called Van Halen to set Beat It aflame ("It was just 20 minutes out of my day," the guitarist later recalled of his celebrated solo).

Family remained Van Halen's bedrock until his passing at St John's Hospital, Santa Monica, aged 65. He doted on his multi-instrumentalist son Wolfgang, a Van Halen member since 2006, and it was he who announced his father had lost "his long and arduous battle with cancer". Angus Young called Eddie's playing "pure wizardry", Ritchie Blackmore recalled "the ultimate guitar hero", and Slash mourned "an amazing guitarist and a helluva guy."

James McNair

> "The ultimate guitar hero."
> RITCHIE BLACKMORE

THE LEGACY

The Album(s): *Van Halen* (Warner Bros, 1978); *1984* (Warner Bros, 1984).

The Sound: Stunt-guitar-led hard rock delivered with maximum pizzazz and poppy, three-part vocal harmonies, *Van Halen* is the earth-shaking hello after seven years as a Pasadena keg-party band. *1984*, meanwhile, is the mid-period masterpiece with added synths and growing intra-band tensions.

Getty

Bunny 'Striker' Lee

Jamaican music icon

BORN 1941

Bunny 'Striker' Lee was one of the last great Jamaican record producers, a cornerstone of reggae who helped shape its sound since the late '60s. A prolific and influential studio man, he played a pivotal role in introducing reggae to the UK in the early '70s and taking the music global.

The first born of 10 children, Lee grew up in the Greenwich Farm district of Kingston and broke into the music business as a record plugger for Duke Reid's Treasure Isle studio in 1962. Lee soon started producing himself, his instinctive ear for a hit coupled with a shrewd business sense scoring him his first success in 1967 with Roy Shirley's Music Field. Hits followed with Derrick Morgan, Pat Kelly, Lester Sterling and Slim Smith, establishing Lee as a top go-to producer and earning him his 'Striker' nickname. Along with other 'small axe' soundmen like Lee 'Scratch' Perry, from 1968-72 Lee challenged the dominance of Treasure Isle and Clement 'Coxsone' Dodd's Studio One with a series of classic 45s, including Max Romeo's Wet Dream, Delroy Wilson's Better Must Come and John Holt's Stick By Me. By the mid 1970s, Lee was enjoying further success with conscious roots singers Cornell Campbell, Horace Andy and Johnny Clarke, the latter's immortal None Shall Escape The Judgement single minting the producer's influential 'flying cymbal' signature sound. Around the same time, Striker and engineer friend King Tubby were revolutionising Jamaican music by creating dub as a separate art form altogether.

While Lee's output slowed to a trickle during the 1980s, his place in the history of reggae was recognised by the Jamaican government in 2008 when he was awarded an Order Of Distinction. More recently, the ailing 79-year-old, always immaculately dressed and wearing his trademark sailor's cap, struggled with kidney problems, eventually succumbing to heart failure on October 6.

Simon McEwen

In a music field of his own: Bunny 'Striker' Lee.

Brian 'Licorice' Locking

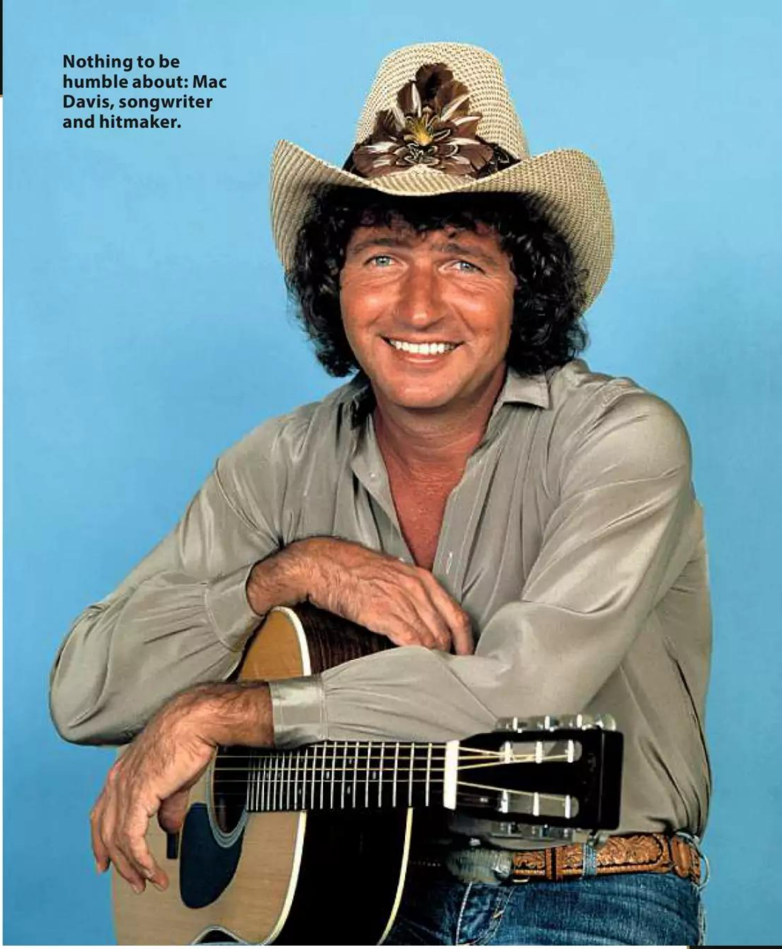
Shadows, Vince Taylor bassist

BORN 1940

Raised in Grantham, as a teen Brian Locking played in the Larry Adler-inspired Harmonica Vagabonds with his friend Roy Taylor. In 1955 they converted to skiffle, when his playing of the clarinet – or "licorice stick" – inspired his nickname. Locking took up bass and the renamed The Vagabonds Skiffle Group played the 2i's in Soho. (Taylor, spotted by Larry Parnes, would move on to solo success as Vince Eager). When touring with Terry Dene, Locking met drummer Brian Bennett: the two would join future Beatles collaborator Tony Sheridan to back Vince Taylor as The Playboys, appearing on Oh Boy! and cutting 45s including Brand New Cadillac. Locking later played with Marty Wilde, Billy Fury, Eddie Cochran, Gene Vincent and Tommy Steele, and in The Krew Kats. In 1962 he replaced Jet Harris in The Shadows, playing on Number 1s Dance On! and Foot Tapper, and appearing in the Cliff Richard musical Summer Holiday. Locking left the band in late 1963 to devote himself to his Jehovah's Witness beliefs, though he'd reunite with The Shadows, The Wildcats and The Vagabonds.

Ian Harrison

Getty (2), Alamy, Tim Barrow/Urbanimage.tv



Nothing to be humble about: Mac Davis, songwriter and hitmaker.

Mac Davis

Country singer and songwriter

BORN 1942

Born in Lubbock, Texas, Mac Davis moved to Atlanta aged 16, where he played in rock'n'roll group The Zots and worked in promotion for the Vee-Jay and Liberty labels.

After meeting Billy Strange, he made the move into songwriting in the late '60s, and in time his compositions would be covered by Nancy Sinatra, Bobby Goldsboro, BJ Thomas, Kenny Rogers & The First Edition and Elvis Presley, who recorded A Little Less Conversation, Don't Cry Daddy, Memories and In The Ghetto. From the early '70s Davis also found fame as a solo singer: 1972's Baby, Don't Get Hooked On Me was a US Number 1, while its parent album sold platinum; other hits included Stop And Smell the Roses, Rock'N'Roll (I Gave You The Best Years Of My Life) and One Hell Of A Woman. In 1980, meanwhile, he had his sole UK hit with Top 30 novelty song It's Hard To Be Humble. A country chart regular until the mid-'80s, he also hosted his NBC show and acted on film and TV. Later songwriting credits included co-writes with Avicii, Bruno Mars and Weezer.

Clive Prior

> "Bunny Lee revolutionised Jamaican music."

Gordon Haskell

Jazz voice and guitar

BORN 1946

Dorset-born Gordon Haskell played with his schoolfriend Robert Fripp in The Ravens and The League Of Gentlemen before joining The Fleur de Lys in 1965. In 1968 he left to join The Flowerpot Men, also playing in Cupid's Inspiration, and recorded his solo debut *Sail In My Boat* in 1969. Initially believing himself too R&B-oriented to work with Fripp, he nonetheless joined King Crimson in 1970, singing on *In The Wake Of Poseidon* and its follow up *Lizard*, but left amid some acrimony. He then signed to Atlantic for the Arif Mardin-produced *It Is And It Isn't* in 1971, though commercial success was not to be. After working with artists including Cliff Richard, Tim Hardin and Alvin Lee, from the 1980s Haskell sustained himself as a gigging musician in Britain and Europe. Then, finding favour on BBC Radio 2 in 2001, his jazzy How Wonderful You Are reached UK Number 2. Back on a major label, his *Harry's Bar* album reached Number 2 in 2002. Later returning to the self-reliant career that had sustained him for so long, his biography The Road To Harry's Bar: Forty Years On The Potholed Path To Stardom was published in 2006. His final long-player, *The Cat Who's Got The Cream*, was released in January.

Ian Harrison

All amp'd up: Spencer Davis, keeping things running.

THE LEGACY

The Album: The Spencer Davis Group *The Second Album* (Fontana, 1966)

The Sound: Preternatural talent Steve Winwood authenticates R&B, jazz, blues and country with covers of Georgia On My Mind, I Washed My Hands In Muddy Water and, ideal for the soul basement, Bobby Parker's Watch Your Step. You can't see the join when Davis co-writes This Hammer and Hey Darling slide in beside.

So Glad We Made It

Spencer Davis, guitarist, singer and leader of the titular '60s R&B hitmakers, died on October 19.

ALTHOUGH THE Spencer Davis Group bore his name, it was the extraordinary teenage singer, guitarist and organist Steve Winwood that everyone came to see and hear. But it had been Davis's eye for talent that had pulled them together in the first place, and his intelligence that kept the name afloat in the years after Winwood left in 1967.

Born Spencer Davies in Swansea on July 17, 1939, he attended Birmingham University in 1960 to study German. He'd also learned guitar, influenced by skiffle and by US bluesmen like Lightnin' Hopkins and Leadbelly, and played with other nascent UK stars of the '60s and beyond, such as the Stones' Bill Wyman and Christine Perfect, later of Fleetwood Mac. But it was catching the Winwood brothers, Steve and the older Muff, with the Muff Woody Jazz Band in a Brum pub that set Davis on his path. Forming a quartet with drummer Pete York, they became The Spencer Davis Group after signing to Island Records in 1964. Their early singles leaned on US covers, but when they looked to Jackie Edwards, a Jamaican singer and songwriter with Island, they had two straight UK Number 1s with the driving R&B of 1965's Keep On Running and the urgency of Somebody Help Me the following year. No one channelled Ray Charles quite as effortlessly as Steve Winwood, and his first forays into co-writing, Gimme Some Lovin' (with brother Muff and Davis) and I'm A Man (with producer Jimmy Miller), broke the band into the US Top 10 chart; pounding and exultant singles that were also portents of the future.

> "Their pounding and exultant singles were portents of the future."

When Steve Winwood left the band in 1967 to form Traffic, Davis regrouped with organist Eddie Hardin, who co-wrote most of 1968's *With Their New Face On* with Davis, and guitarist Phil Sawyer, quickly replaced by Ray Fenwick. Some of their music was used in the '68 movie Here We Go Round The Mulberry Bush – ironically, Traffic were also involved – and Davis, Fenwick and Hardin co-wrote and recorded the theme for Thames TV's Magpie children's programme, but Davis had to regroup again for 1969's *Letters From Edith*, with bassist Nigel Olsson and drummer Dee Murray, who'd later form Elton John's backing band. Thereafter, Davis admitted his group without Steve Winwood were finished.

Davis moved to the US West Coast in 1970, recording '71's *It's Been So Long*, and a year later released *Mousetrap*, produced by Sneaky Pete Kleinow, a veritable kaleidoscope of ideas. He later worked back at Island in artist development, re-formed The Spencer Davis Group without Winwood and recorded 1984's solo return *Crossfire*, on which Dusty Springfield guested. In the '90s he gathered various incarnations of the Classic Rock All Stars, led line-ups of The Spencer Davis Group right up to 2017, and reflected on his Welsh heritage on 2006's solo album *So Far* through songs such as The Mumbles Train and Uncle Herman's Mandolin, a tribute to the man and the instrument that had started Davis on his journey, aged six, long ago in Swansea.

Geoff Brown

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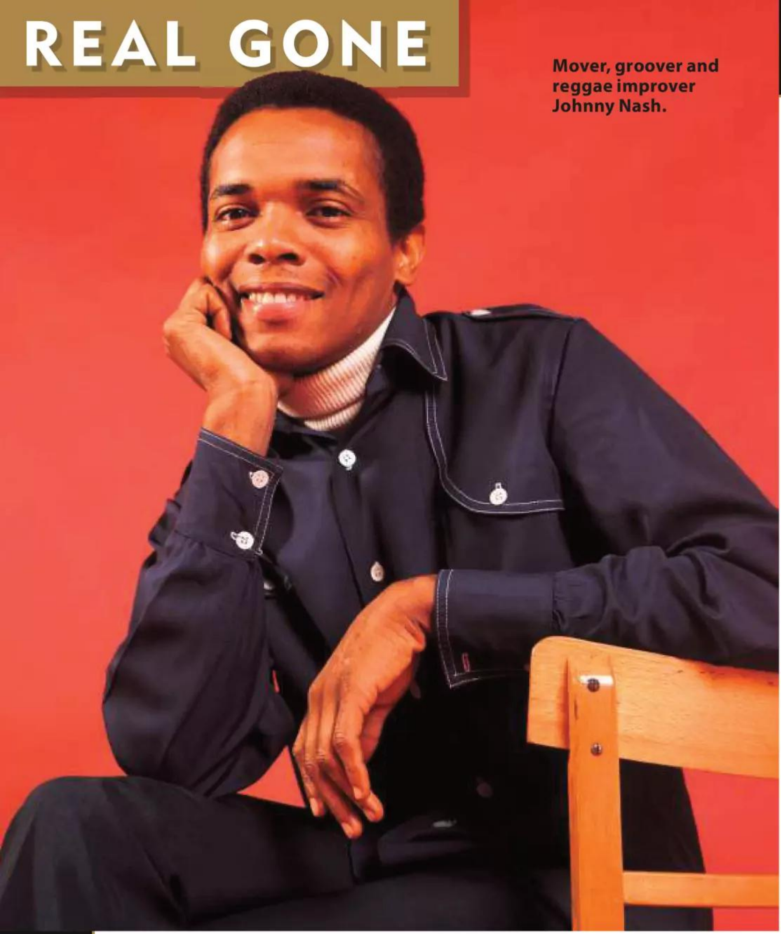

Mover, groover and reggae improver Johnny Nash.

Johnny Nash

Soul/reggae voice

BORN 1940

Johnny Nash's attractive light-toned tenor had a lot in common with Sam Cooke's, a hint of Solomon Burke in there too, but where Cooke leaned on gospel, Houston, Texas-born Nash would in the later '60s base himself in Jamaica and adopt the lilt of rocksteady and emerging reggae. The rise was cemented when Nash took Stir It Up, a song by the then little-known Bob Marley, into the Top 15 in the UK and US in 1972/3. He would also popularise Marley's Guava Jelly, Reggae On Broadway, their co-write You Poured Sugar On Me and others. However, Nash's own message of sunny optimism, 1972's I Can See Clearly Now, provided his most lasting epitaph, though 1975's Tears On My Pillow was his final big hit, topping the UK charts. Nash had actually enjoyed a first US pop hit in 1958 on ABC-Paramount with MOR ballad A Very Special Love. Ditching the majors in the '60s, he set up his own Joda and JAD labels, the hits starting with his first wife Margaret's songs Let's Move And Groove Together (1965) and You Got Soul, and his own Hold Me Tight, the last two both UK Top 10 hits in '68. A 1969 reggae-flavoured version of Cooke's Cupid (Number 6 UK) laid more groundwork for reggae's ascension as a mainstream UK genre. However, his own rise hit a wall. "In most cases, when you get a hit single from the album, the album moves too," he said when I last interviewed him in 1977. "That's [never] happened in my case. I'd hate to think that the albums are that bad." They weren't. He also mentioned his continuing efforts to find a distributor for Love Is Not A Game, a film he'd acted in and soundtracked in Sweden in 1970. But the most significant event of that visit would be the time spent evolving a reggae style with Marley, who he'd taken along on the trip. In the latter part of the '70s, after the hits, Nash moved back to Houston and, essentially, out of the music business.

Geoff Brown

THEY ALSO SERVED

DJ and Balearic beat pioneer **JOSÉ PADILLA** (below, b.1955) made famous the chillout genre with a series of mix compilations named after the San Antonio bar where he was resident DJ, Café Del Mar. He'd moved to Ibiza in 1975 and would sell bootleg tapes of the cross-genre sets he designed to accompany the sunset views. The first official Café Del Mar compilation in 1994, which he curated, began one of the most successful series of comps ever. He also recorded solo and DJ'd internationally.

FOUNDER of LA's Slash Records, **BOB BIGGS** (b.1946) nurtured the city's unique strand of punk, championing bands like **X**, **Germs** and **The Blasters**. Founded in 1978 as a spin-off of his neighbour's failing punk fanzine, Slash's first release was Lexicon Devil, a 7-inch by the Germs. In 1980, *Los Angeles* by X gave Biggs's label its first nationwide success. In '83, **Violent Femmes**' self-titled debut became a million-seller. That year, a distribution deal with Warner Bros saw success beyond punk with **Los Lobos**. After selling Slash to London Records, Biggs stayed on to oversee huge success with **Faith No More**.

LIVERPOOL music mainstay **HAMBI HARALAMBOUS** (b.1951) played in post-punks **Tontrix** with future members of **Adam & The Ants** and **A Flock Of Seagulls**, and with **Wayne Hussey** signed to Virgin with **Hambi & The Dance**. His Pink Studio attracted local talents including **Dead Or Alive**, **Frankie Goes To Hollywood** and **Black**; later, his Pink Museum hosted recording sessions by **Oasis**, **The La's**, **Arctic Monkeys** and more. He also worked in film production, creating on-stage visuals for the reformed **OMD**.

SINGER **DYAN BIRCH** (below, b.1949) worked in Brian Epstein's NEMS outlet in Liverpool before forming **Arrival**, whose 1970 hit singles included Friends (Number 8) and I Will Survive (Number 16). The group later morphed into multi-vocalist white soul band **Kokomo**, who found acclaim on the mid-'70s London pub rock scene and were engaged by **Bob Dylan** to work on his troubled 1976 LP *Desire*. Unable to make a breakthrough Kokomo split in 1977. Birch's session credits included **Marianne Faithfull**, **Bryan Ferry**, **Manfred Mann**, **Dana Gillespie**, **Alvin Lee**, **Tom Robinson** and **Ian Dury**. From 2008 she would take part in Kokomo reunions.

FLAUTIST and saxophonist **JON GIBSON** (b.1940) was an early practitioner of minimalism on pioneering works by **Terry Riley**, **Steve Reich**, **La Monte Young**, and **Philip Glass**, whose Ensemble he co-founded. Of Gibson's mastery of circular breathing, Glass wrote, "the music wouldn't have happened" without it. He also regularly played with **Moondog**, and later collaborated with **Arthur Russell**, **Harold Budd**, **Merce Cunningham** and others. He also made solo LPs and worked in visual art.

TENNESSEE drummer **WS 'FLUKE' HOLLAND** (b.1935) was originally a bassist, but switched to percussion to play with **Carl Perkins** in 1954 (his nickname owed to his career's serendipitous path). Playing on Perkins' 1955 recording of Blue Suede Shoes, as well as for **Roy Orbison**, **Billy Lee Riley** and others, Holland was also present for the 'Million Dollar Quartet' session of Perkins, **Johnny Cash**, **Jerry Lee Lewis** and **Elvis Presley** at Sun Studios in December 1956. In 1959 he first played in Cash's band, and would remain there, on-stage and in the studio, until the Man In Black's retirement from touring in 1997.

DRUMMER **VIOLA SMITH** (below, b.1912) played in her family's orchestra in Wisconsin before she and her reeds-playing sister Mildred formed the all-woman **Coquettes** band: in 1942 she wrote a piece in Down Beat arguing that female players were the equals of men. She later joined the **Hour Of Charm Orchestra**, gained the nickname "the female Gene Krupa", performed with **Ella Fitzgerald** and played at **Harry S Truman**'s Presidential inauguration. Later projects included **Viola And Her Seventeen Drums** and **The Kit Kats**. Last year, Jazz Journal reported she still occasionally played in groups in Cosa Mesa, California.

OUTLAW country singer **JERRY JEFF WALKER** (b.1942) was an itinerant busker until he formed folk rockers **Circus Maximus** in New York in 1967. After that group failed to ignite, he went solo, and cut his most famous composition, Mr Bojangles, in 1968: the song of a homeless alcoholic tap dancer would be turned into a hit by The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, and was later covered by Sammy Davis Jr, Harry Belafonte, Bob Dylan and many more. Successful on the US country charts from '75 to '78, the then-Austin, Texas-resident Walker later founded his own Tried & True imprint to release his music. His last album was 2018's *It's About Time*.

DRUMMER and vocalist **DAVE MUNDEN** (b.1943) was a founder member of Dagenham group **Brian Poole And The Tremeloes**, who famously saw off **The Beatles** at an audition for Decca in 1962. Hitting Number 1 with their cover of The Contours' Do You Love Me in 1963 and, after Poole left, Silence Is Golden in 1967, the band remained Top 10 prospects until 1970. Munden stayed with the group, a '70s hiatus apart, and would become its longest-serving member. He later reunited with former bandmates for live shows, but retired in 2018, citing knee issues.

EDINBURGH voice **JACKIE DENNIS** (b.1942) – AKA 'The Kilted Choirboy' – was discovered by comedy duo **Mike and Bernie Winters** in 1958. He hit Number 4 with his debut 45 La Dee Dah, following with a Top 30 cover of The Purple People Eater. He appeared on **Perry Como**'s TV show and in Las Vegas, and retired from music in the later '70s.

Jenny Bulley and Clive Prior

Getty (2), Alamy, Avalon.red

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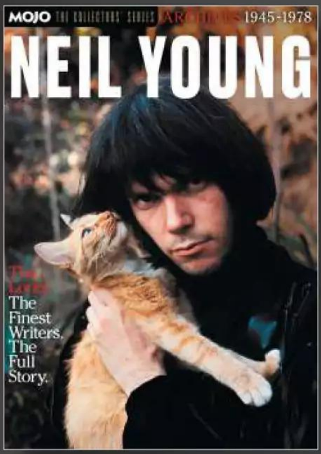
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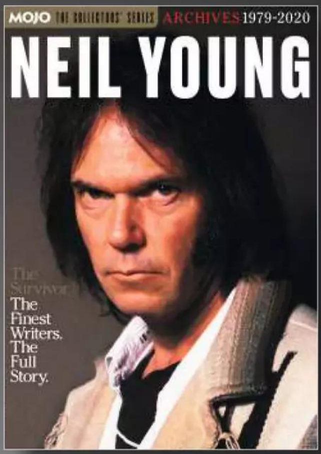
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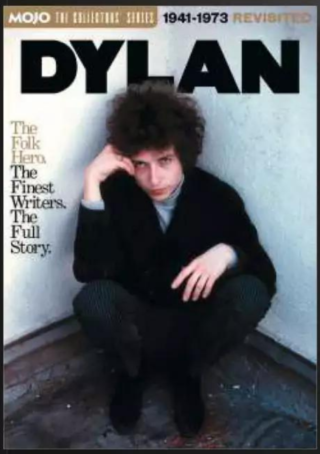
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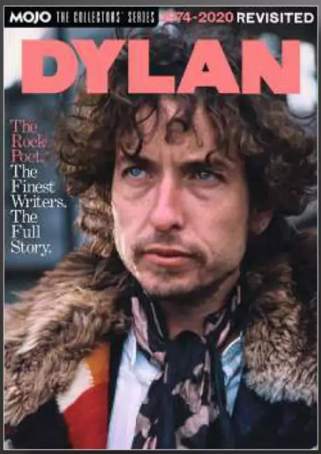
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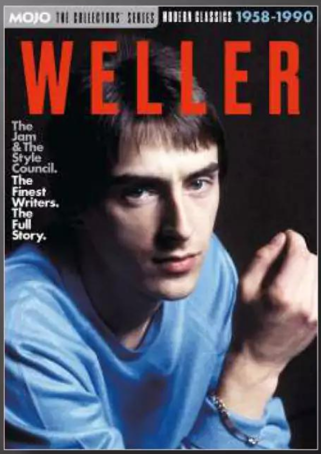
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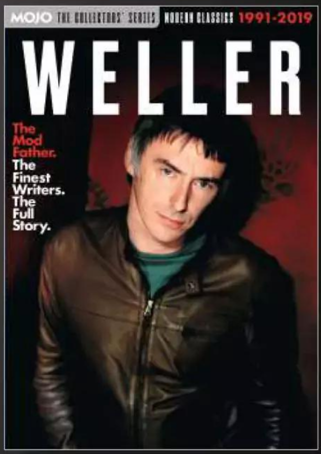
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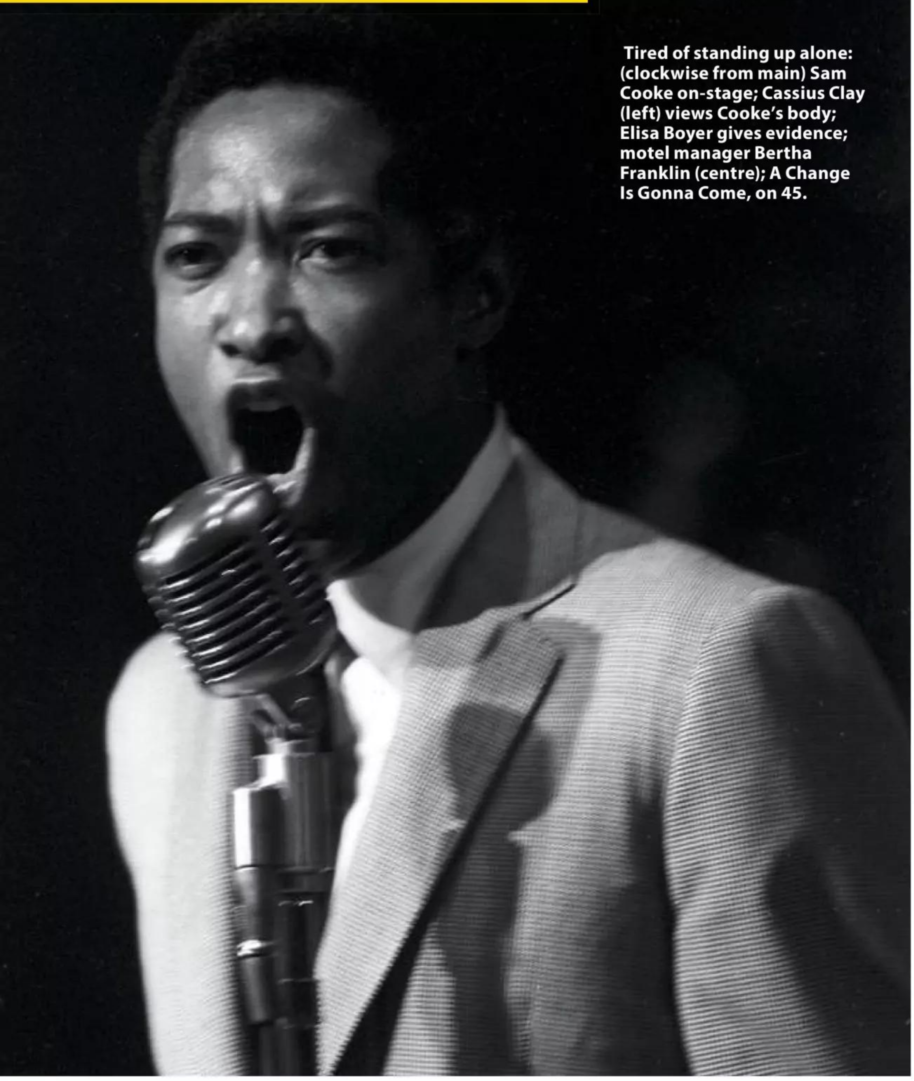

Tired of standing up alone: (clockwise from main) Sam Cooke on-stage; Cassius Clay (left) views Cooke's body; Elisa Boyer gives evidence; motel manager Bertha Franklin (centre); A Change Is Gonna Come, on 45.

DECEMBER 1964

...Sam Cooke is murdered

DECEMBER 11 His swinging *Live At The Copa* album had entered the Top 100 and his trophy cabinet of hits included Chain Gang, Wonderful World and Twistin' The Night Away. He was telegenic, with a voice of effortless emotive power, and his self-penned material was growing in vision; he'd also foreseen how to survive an exploitative music business, having set up his own publishing concern and label.

Surely it was only a matter of time before Sam Cooke crossed over into the premier league of American entertainers, alongside Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr and the rest. Yet in the early hours of this December Monday, Sam Cooke met the most dismal of ends, shot to death in a Los Angeles fleapit motel.

Born in 1931 in Mississippi to a pastor father, Cooke had grown up in Chicago and by 1950 was singing lead with gospel legends The Soul Stirrers. In 1957 the now-secular solo singer reached US Number 1 with You Send Me. Another 15 Top 20 entries followed. His chart successes appealed to white listeners in droves, but after the Freedom Rides and the March On Washington – as well as such personal experiences as being arrested after being refused entry to a hotel in Louisiana in autumn 1963 – racism in America was becoming impossible for him to gloss over, however mainstream the TV show.

Consequently, Cooke's greatest composition, civil rights anthem A Change Is Gonna Come, spoke directly to what America promised and what she delivered. Influenced by Dylan's Blowin' In The Wind, this horizon-gazing freedom prayer, symphonically arranged by René Hall, referred to racial segregation and included the poignant line, "It's been too hard living, but I'm afraid to die." Cooke biographer Peter Guralnick recalled Cooke playing it to his guitarist Bobby Womack. "Bobby said, 'It sounds like death.' Sam said, 'Man, that's kind of how it sounds like to me. That's why I'm never going to play it in public.'" The song was performed for the first and only time on The Tonight Show on February 7, 1964, appearing on Cooke's LP *Ain't That Good News* within the month.

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A CHANGE IS GONNA COME
SAM COOKE

“If Cooke had been Frank Sinatra… the FBI would be investigating.”
CASSIUS CLAY

Cooke's last night involved talk of other future directions. He and he his engineer Al Schmitt, plus the latter's wife Joan, went to Martoni's Italian restaurant off Sunset Boulevard to discuss a new blues album. At one point, Joan saw Cooke waving a fat wad of thousands of dollars around and advised him to hide it. Cooke was later seen at the bar with the 22-year-old Elisa Boyer. The two left Martoni's after midnight, stopped off at P.J.'s nightclub in West Hollywood and then drove in Cooke's red Ferrari 250 GT Lusso to the Motel Hacienda, a $3-a-night place with a sign advertising 'Free Radio TV' in south-central LA. At 3am Boyer called police from a telephone box on the street; and at 6am, Cooke's wife Barbara was called to tell her that her husband was dead.

At the perfunctory two-hour inquest on December 16, Boyer, was wearing shades and headscarf, alleged Cooke was planning to rape her. She had fled, taking his clothes, when he was in the bathroom. Wearing just his jacket and one shoe, the over-the-limit Cooke had then driven to motel manager

Bertha Franklin's office, breaking the door down and demanding to know where Boyer was. Franklin said, "he grabbed both my arms… I was fightin', scratchin', bitin'… finally I got up and grabbed a pistol." A bullet went through Cooke's lungs and heart: his last words, "Lady, you shot me." It was ruled a "justifiable homicide". The fat wad was never recovered, or the clothes Boyer took.

There were viewings of his open-topped casket in Los Angeles, where Cooke's friend Cassius Clay came to say his goodbyes. Said the great boxer, "If Cooke had been Frank Sinatra, The Beatles or Ricky Nelson the FBI would be investigating… and that woman would have been sent to prison." After a public memorial in Chicago, Cooke was interred on January 2, 1965 in Hollywood's Forest Lawn cemetery, where The Staple Singers, Ray Charles, Lou Rawls and others sang him to his rest. A Change Is Gonna Come had been released on 45 on December 22, eventually reaching Number 31.

It later transpired that Bertha Franklin had a criminal record for pimping. In January, Elisa Boyer was arrested in a Hollywood motel on a prostitution rap. It wasn't hard to see conspiracy, cover-up and proof that the LAPD simply didn't care.

Music's loss was immeasurable, but Sam Cooke's epitaph lives on. Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin, Beyoncé and many more covered A Change Is Gonna Come; a victorious President Obama quoted it in 2008 in Chicago, and a current online music initiative to encourage US voter registration took its name from it. The song still speaks to anyone who wishes, let change finally come.

Ian Harrison

Real live ones: The Yardbirds, with Clapton, bottom right.

Yardbirds release first LP

DECEMBER 31 **The Yardbirds' debut album *Five Live Yardbirds* is released. Recorded at the Marquee in March, its adrenalised electric blues covers of Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry and Howlin' Wolf showcase the band's 'Rave Up' tactic of extending songs to incite audience reaction. It fails to chart. From December 24, The Yardbirds play Another Beatles Christmas Show at the Hammersmith Odeon, where they join the Fabs, Freddie And The Dreamers, Elkie Brooks and The Mike Cotton Sound in a music and comedy revue which runs until January 16. In March, Record Mirror reports guitarist Eric Clapton is leaving to join Mike O'Neil Jr And The Soul Brothers. He will in fact join John Mayall's Bluesbreakers, and is replaced by Jeff Beck.**

rave
THE FRANK LOOK AT TODAY'S POP WORLD
DECEMBER
THE BEATLE WHO LOST OUT!
ANIMALS-SANDIE-CLARK-
HOLLIES-KINKS-McQUEEN-POOLE

The snack… and how to get it: egg sarnie fan Sandie Shaw with (inset) this month's Rave.

YULE BE RAVING

DECEMBER 1 Rave magazine publishes a "Party Check List" of pop stars' choices of Eats, Drinks and Discs for Christmas get-togethers. Mick Jagger, for example, wants to eat "cold meat, bread and butter," drink Scotch and Coke and listen to Bo Diddley. Paul McCartney, on the other hand, prefers "rolls with chips" washed down with chilled beer as Marvin Gaye plays. While Sandie Shaw and Manfred Mann go for "fried egg sandwiches" and "sausage rolls galore" respectively, Marianne Faithfull requests "small fancy cakes", Beaujolais and Joan Baez. Dusty Springfield and George Harrison also take part. Cheese biscuit fan P.J. Proby, whose arrest for on-stage trouser-splitting at the Northampton ABC is weeks away, says he's "not fussy" about what he drinks.

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ALSO ON!

VELVET ORIGINS

3 **Lou Reed** and **John Cale**'s band **The Primitives** play their first gig at the Riverside Plaza Hotel. Afterwards they tape a rehearsal at member Walter DeMaria's East Village loft. On the tape is novelty 45 The Ostrich, released soon on the Pickwick City label.

DINO, BILLY, IRA & GEORGE

22 Billy Wilder's **Dean Martin**-starring sex comedy Kiss Me Stupid is released. Dino sings three songs by Ira Gershwin using unheard music by his late brother George. Blasted by the Catholic Legion Of Decency, the film flops.

BRITS GO HOME

26 In Billboard, **Dick Clark** says British bands in the US – the "Redcoat invasion" – earn fees inflated by The Beatles' success. In the UK, the new Impresarios Guild, chaired by Tito Burns and Larry Parnes, also says bands are paid too much.

T.A.M.I WHAMMY

29 Gig movie the T.A.M.I Show is released. Filmed at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, it stars **James Brown**, **The Beach Boys**, **Marvin Gaye**, **the Stones**, **The Miracles**, **Chuck Berry**, **The Supremes** and more.

FABS ON TOP

31 Having released *Beatles For Sale* on December 4, the band end the year with I Feel Fine at Number 1 in the UK and US.

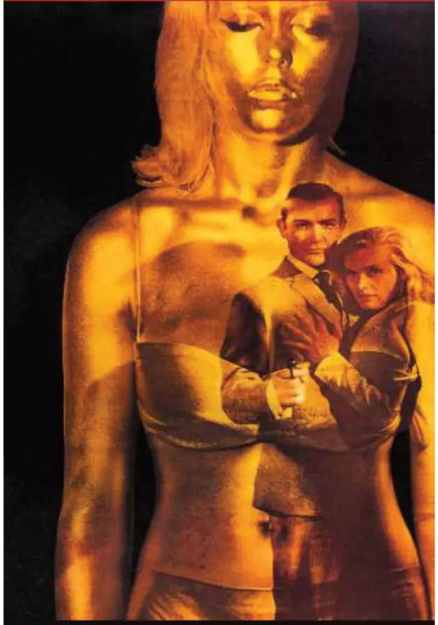
TOP TEN

HONG KONG SINGLES DECEMBER 5

1 **OH, PRETTY WOMAN** ROY ORBISON LONDON AMERICAN
2 **YOU BETTER MOVE ON** THE ROLLING STONES DECCA
3 **I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER** THE BEATLES PARLOPHONE
4 **IF I FELL** THE BEATLES PARLOPHONE
5 **AIN'T THAT LOVING YOU BABY** ELVIS PRESLEY RCA VICTOR
6 **A HARD DAY'S NIGHT EP** THE BEATLES PARLOPHONE
7 **EVERYBODY KNOWS** TONY MYATT DIAMOND
8 **THINGS WE SAID TODAY** THE BEATLES PARLOPHONE
9 **FROM RUSSIA WITH LOVE** AL CAIOLA UA
10 **SLAUGHTER ON TENTH AVENUE** THE VENTURES LIBERTY

In a Cig Country: The Big O, at Number 1 in HK.

AD ARCHIVE 1964



Out in the US, the new Bond offers thrills, spills and women painted gold (here, movie titles star Margaret Nolan). So it's, "Gold-fingaaaaahh!"

FUNK MASTER
"BELLEVUE PATIENT"
WIZARD WIZ
THE FUNK MASTER

Live wire satire: (clockwise from top left) Tom Lehrer with delicious sponge fingers; rocketman Wernher Von Braun; Frank Sinatra holds back on the do-be-do-be-do; Funk Master Wizard Wiz; The Sisters Of Mercy – are they the Eskimo ringleaders?

Who heard their own diss tracks?

Thar she blows! For ace cover, label nomenclature and mystery rapper disclosures…

Carly Simon said Warren Beatty – the alleged star of her [1972 US Number 1] hit You're So Vain – once called to thank her for the song. What are other good examples of the subject of a composition responding to it?

Lee Higham, via e-mail

Fred Says: If we mean public disagreement rather than answer records or engineered beefs to hype sales, reactions vary widely. In 1974, Lynyrd Skynyrd's Sweet Home Alabama coolly named Neil Young and his songs Alabama and Southern Man: a contrite Neil later wrote that he "richly deserved the shot." When MOJO writer Mat Snow was beasted on 1986 Nick Cave flexi Scum (after being lukewarm about his ex-house-mate Cave's LP *The Firstborn Is Dead*), he declared it "very funny", while Island boss Chris Blackwell has responded to Lee Perry's accusations that he is a vampire by saying the two care about each other. By contrast, on 2005 documentary Derailroaded, radio host Dr. Demento remembered Frank Zappa's response to the flailing attack on Frank by Zappa's former friend Wild Man Fischer. "He just turned purple with rage," said Demento. "He also got me to agree that I would not play [it] again." Probably the apotheosis of such on-wax spats is when John Lennon aimed How Do You Sleep? at Paul McCartney in 1971, though let's not forget Tom Lehrer's satirical 1965 song Wernher von Braun, which questioned the Nazi scientist's role in America's space programme. Arthur C. Clarke recalled Von Braun "had a great sense of humour – though it was tested to the breaking point" when he heard the song at a party. Lehrer, who's still with us aged 92, later said reports that Von Braun had sued him were false.

WHO'S THE RAPPER?

I have an old-school hip-hop mixtape which features a sample of someone saying, "first there was dope, then came coke, then good 'erb was the word." Any ideas who it is?

Barry Fraser, via e-mail

Fred Says: That is none other than Funk Master Wizard Wiz, who found infamy in 1984 with his oddly ambivalent Crack It Up (Ya Better Not), from which that sample is taken. The Bronx MC and beatboxer, who recalled eating dog food on-stage and paying someone in the crowd to smoke a crack pipe during live shows in the '80s, also recorded as Optimist Prime: his most recent albums include *X-Plicit* (2018) and *No Artificial Flava's* (2019).

YEAR OF THE AXE

I was thinking about the great version of It Was A Very Good Year David Axelrod recorded with Lou Rawls. It's completely different to Frank Sinatra's classic version but, even so, it's brilliant. Are there any other versions you could recommend?

John Fox, Chester.

Fred Says: The version by Ray Charles and Willie Nelson is worth checking out, while Wes Montgomery's instrumental take, heard on his *Goin' Out Of My Head* album, bears repeat hearings (we can't comment on the Boris Karloff or William Shatner versions). Initially, though, composer Ervin Drake had intended the song to become a folk classic and the first recording was made by The Kingston Trio's Bob Shane in 1961. The story goes that Drake included a brief refrain between each verse in which folkies could inject a "hey nonny, nonny" phrase or suchlike. Instead, Gordon Jenkins filled the space with a gorgeous string motif. "Just be glad I didn't sing do-be-do-be-do," chortled Sinatra, whose version won a Grammy for Best Male Vocal Performance in 1966.

THAT'S ME ON THE LABEL

The A&M label was named after its owners, Herb Alpert and Jerry Moss, while the reggae label DEB took its name from Dennis Emmanuel Brown. What was the first label to be named after the entrepreneur who launched it?

T. Whitburn, via e-mail

Fred Says: It's a practice that harks back to 1888, when Thomas A Edison began marketing Edison Records, the first-ever label. Others to combine founders' names – with thanks to rock historian/producer Alan Warner for his input – include Paxley (Kim Fowley and Gary 'Alley Oop' Paxton), Chrysalis (Chris Wright and Terry Ellis), Philles (Phil Spector and Lester Sill), Stax (Jim Stewart and Estelle Axton) and Vee-Jay ('Vee' for Vivian Carter and 'Jay' for her husband, Jimmy Bracken). The neatest, however, has to be Bang, each letter standing for one of its four owners – Bert Berns, Ahmet Ertegun, Nesuhi Ertegun and Gerald (Jerry) Wexler.

HELP FRED

Who *were* goth rock fans the Eskimos, exactly? Were they exclusively affiliated to either The Mission, Fields Of The Nephilim or The Sisters Of Mercy, or were they non-denominational gig-goers?

Roy Sparks, via e-mail

CONTACT FRED

To get your questions answered, conundrums clarified or help untangle a puzzle, e-mail:

Fred Dellar and his assistants direct at fred.dellar@bauermedia.co.uk

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Speaker pimps

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The closing date for entries is **January 2**. For the rules of the quiz, go to www.mojo4music.com.

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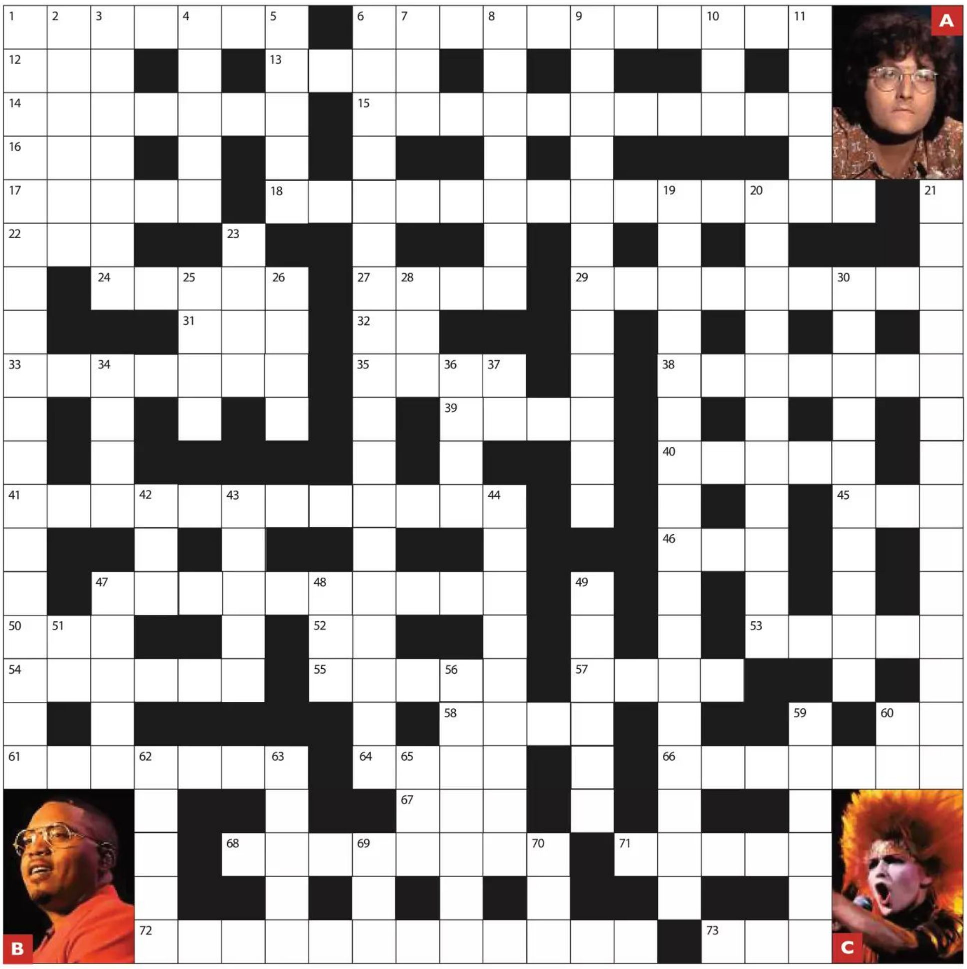


Getty (3)

ANSWERS

MOJO 324

Across: 1 Zowie Bowie, 5 Buffin, 9 Henry Cow, 12 Om, 14 Knox, 15 Moya, 17 Reel, 18 Bill Evans, 19 RAK, 22 Honk, 23 Lady, 24 Hi, 25 Ink, 26 Gusto, 29 Johnny Ace, 31 Amok, 32 Rio, 34 As, 35 Users, 36 Goo, 37 LP, 39 Tank, 40 Gut Of The Quantifier, 45 Us, 46 Be, 47 Biba, 51 Can, 52 Voltaire, 53 Triumph, 54 Uncle Dave Macon, 59 Nems, 60 Babble, 61 VU, 64 Poco, 65 Area, 67 Aloner, 68 Kit, 69 Zones

Down: 2 Wynder K Frog, 3 Beck, 4 Ear, 6 AKA Frank Tovey, 7 Ideas, 8 Roy Lynes, 9 Heroin, 10 On, 11 Working, 13 Mae, 15 MIA, 16 Old, 18 Bley, 20 Ah, 21 Kinks Kinkdom, 27 Taste, 28 Omeara, 29 Jolt, 30 Camus, 32 Orn, 36 Ghost Town, 38 Pole, 41 UK, 42 Hain, 43 Quad, 44 Nyro, 47 Ba, 48 Safari, 49 Trio, 50 Ludus, 51 Chubb Rock, 55 Cabaret, 56 Diesel, 57 Vulcan, 58 Neu, 61 Venus, 62 Coil, 63 Zero, 66 Rez

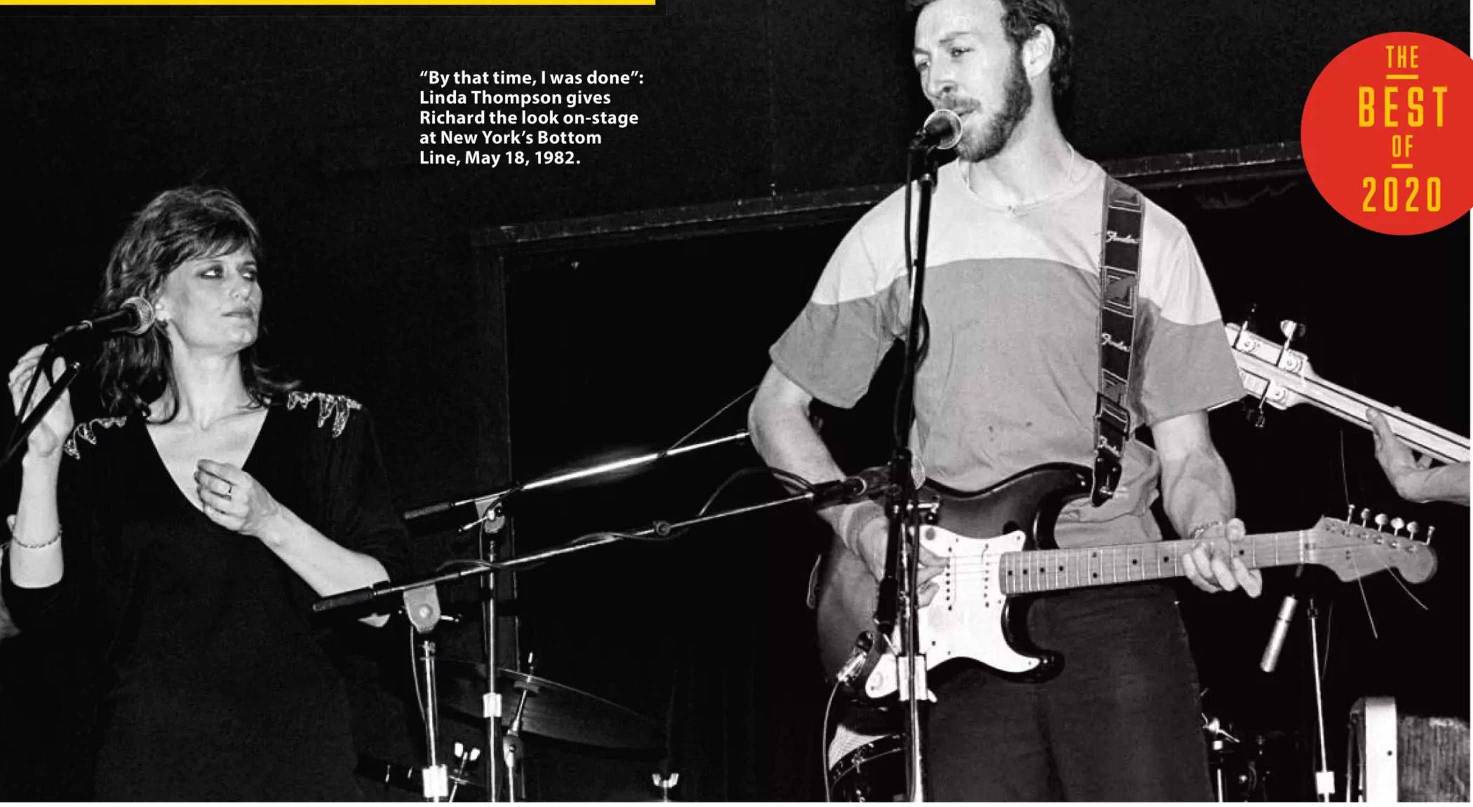
Winners: David Hutt of **Stourbridge** and **Sandy Winton** of **Fife** each win a Sony NW-A105 Walkman®

ACROSS

1 The 'Forbidden Dance' from Brazil (7)
2 Pram's Atlantic 1995 album (8,3)
12 Vulgaris, Breakbeat or Loop Da Loop? (3)
13 Mr B Held (producer) (4)
14 The Motors' take-off spot (7)
15 See photoclue A (5,6)
16 Sarah McLachlan's debut single (3)
17 His sole long-player was *Love Me Crazy* in 1977 (5)
18 Joe Simon and Millie Jackson sang on this 1973 OST (9,5)
22 See photoclue B (3)
24 See photoclue C (5)
27 Jello Biafra's fatty side project (4)
29 Clinic's great ape pal (9)
31 Emotional hardcore? (3)
32 Cedric Brooks' nickname (2)
33 They sang of Big Cheese, Beans and Lithium (7)
35 Boo Radleys' man (4)
38 Early ------- (Zep bootleg) (7)
39 Casey Chaos' band (4)
40 The Clash's kind of English war (5)
41 Bob Downes' plugged-in metropolis (8,4)
45 AKA Ms Moyet (3)
46 The Beach Boys surfin' destination (3)
47 George Clinton's bro (5,5)
50 Sheffield bleepmasters (3)
52 Dexys' Mr Archer (2)
53 Funeral song (5)
54 Home of SXSW (6)
55 Thee Oh Sees' was warm (5)
57 Initially, Swedish pop deities (4)
58 Radiophonic Daphne (4)
60 Mutant Disco label (2)
61 Black Uhuru and Prince Jammy in Paradise? (4,3)
64 Where Tull's '77 songs came from (4)
66 Did Tangerine Dream cross it in '75? (7)
67 Scissor Sisters' Ms Matronic (3)
68 Lloyd Cole cleaned 'em out (8)
71 ----- Frog (The Doors) (5)
72 Dave Edmunds' hymn to his bro's (2,3,3,4)
73 Robert Stigwood's label (1,1,1)

DOWN

1 Peter, Paul And Mary announce their departure in '69 (7,2,1,3,5)
2 West German label (6)
3 Idles' Mercedes driver (7)
4 Billy Childish's nut-Man (5)
5 Camera, Mystic or Mirrored (5)
6 Jefferson Airplane's sleep aid (12, 6)
7 Old-time voice and guitar Mr Martin (3)
8 Geoff, Joe or Stuart? (7)
9 Maker of Latin Kraftwerk covers (5, 7)
10 Man of Lucifer and Apple Pie (3)
11 Kid Creole wasn't her daddy (5)
19 Stranglers' bass (4-7,6)
20 U2-baiting culture-jammers (11)
21 Paul Robeson sings songs of the USSR and Republican Spain (5,2,4,3)
23 Kendrick Lamar's 2017 oath (4)
25 Affirmative Brownsville Station LP (4)
26 The Electric Prunes' Banana caper (4)
28 What Françoise Hardy called her rose (3)
30 Dyke's band (3,7)
34 Julian Cope's ceremony (4)
36 John Power's post-La's band (4)
37 Koki Emura's eclectic Japanese label (2)
42 Throbbing Gristle offshoot (3)
43 Damned keysman/guitarist Jugg (5)
44 Beatles, lachrymose about the past (9)
47 Donovan, Steely Dan and Blink-182 have sung to her (5)
48 Mason Williams' was classical (3)
49 Lux and Ivy's tummy trouble? (6)
51 *Who* Schnickens? (2)
56 Bowie's daydream (7)
59 Louisiana music (6)
60 Matthew Shipp/William Parker LP (2)
62 Procul Harum's new album? (5)
63 Storyville's street of the blues (5)
65 Skip Spence's paddle (3)
69 Tortoise blow up (3)
70 Ms Catwoman (3)



"By that time, I was done": Linda Thompson gives Richard the look on-stage at New York's Bottom Line, May 18, 1982.

Linda and Richard Thompson

It began in Sandy Denny's flat. And ended in **deep unhappiness** on a West Coast stage.

HELLO WINTER 1969

We met in a Chinese restaurant on Kings Road. It was old-fashioned Chinese food, so the place reeked of MSG and the staff was well surly. I sat beside RT [Richard Thompson]. I had on a long blue skin- tight dress. Weird what you remember. I seem to remember him talking about how you eat an animal's fear when you eat meat. I didn't even put down my duck pancake! Joe Boyd was there too, and I had a massive crush on him. Before we went to the Chinese, we had been in Sound Techniques Studio, in Old Church Street in Chelsea. Apparently, we had been drinking and singing rock'n'roll songs much to Joe's chagrin. Time is money!

Joe and I ended up living together. Well. Joe and I split up. I was always at Sandy [Denny, Fairport Convention singer]'s flat. Richard was there quite often too. He had a lovely girlfriend who had a slight turn in her eye. You never knew who she was talking to. They split up too, and proximity took over, plus you have to fall for someone who plays the guitar like he did. Rude not to. We were young. We lusted. Those were the days. When we did get together, I think it was when he had just left Fairport. He wanted to work the folk clubs – why? – I was already on that circuit, so we teamed up. The only other musician I had sung with was Martin Carthy. I sure knew how to pick a picker. My dream would have been George Harrison, but he wasn't available.

The romance [they married in October 1972] preceded the musical partnership. We did like the sound we made, I think. We were both seasoned harmony singers, so it was easy. You don't really question things at that age though. Sandy had turned him on to a lot of trad music.

I knew that stuff inside out too, so that was useful. It was a time of experimentation. We were signed to Island immediately. [Label boss] Chris Blackwell never interfered. We had it good. We had no money of course, but we didn't really need much.

GOODBYE SUMMER 1982

The relationship ended when I was pregnant. Richard went on a US tour and met someone else. Did our so-called spiritual life contribute to the demise of the relationship? Bound to have really. We were repressed and scared in a way. When we left the community [a Sufi Muslim commune in Suffolk, in 1977], we felt a bit at sea.

I went on the Shoot Out The Lights tour of America largely because nobody wanted me to. Did we play sets and fight? Yes and no. Richard didn't fight. I punched him a few times and was always sticking my foot out to trip him up. So puerile! Bopped Richard with a Coke bottle. Stole a car from the parking lot in Niagara Falls. Drove to the actual Falls. Got arrested. Car belonged to a fan so he didn't mind. Someone bailed me out. Delayed adolescence. Why did I do all these things? Are you drunk? I had just had a baby. I'd been dumped. I was inconsolable. I was hardly going to make nice. I was deeply unhappy, but I never would have left. I had three kids.

"You have to fall for someone who plays guitar like he did."
LINDA THOMPSON

The last date of tour for me was LA. By that time I was done, even though there were a couple of shows in San Fran still to do. Linda Ronstadt took me to her house to recuperate. I had a hangover for about three days. After the tour was over Richard stayed on with his lover. I went home to the kids and the baby and my sainted mum.

It was hard, but when it was over, I stopped drinking and taking anti-depressants and started to regroup. With an actual group. Now I can be dispassionate about it, but it was the start of a long road made better by [musical director] John Tams and [theatre director] Bill Bryden. I signed on to do The Mystery Plays at the National Theatre. So prestigious, which I didn't appreciate at the time. I was there on and off for years. Loved it.

Richard And Linda Thompson's Hard Luck Stories (1972-1982) is out now on UMC.

Linda and Richard in the early '70s; (left) Linda today.

Ebet Roberts/Getty, photo thanks to Andrew Batt

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